FOUR DEMOCRATIC PRACTICES

by
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Abstract: This dissertation begins with a problem. Democracy as a concept, and as a practice, has come under attack. This dissertation is concerned with bringing to attention the ways in which Shakespeare's theater gives us access to experiences that could allow us to imagine new democratic practices or techniques of the self. I see role-playing, courage, optimism, and overhearing as a set of democratic practices that I argue can help revitalize democracy, analyzing themes from Shakespeare with and against contemporary theorists such as Jürgen Habermas, Lauren Berlant, and Jacques Ranciere. I argue that Shakespeare's writing gives us access to dramatizations of experiences and rich characterizations of human beings that can allow us to imagine democratic ideals in fresh and exciting new ways. Through close readings and more cultural analyses, I appropriate Shakespeare for our own time, to make him relevant politically for us.

Readers: Jane Bennett, Sam Chambers, William Connolly, Paul Delnero, Andrew Miller

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Introduction: Is it curtains for democracy? The case for one last act

This dissertation begins with a problem. Democracy as a concept, and as a practice, has come under attack. To a number of contemporary theorists, it seems threadbare, nothing more than an empty term, a false promise. As Wendy Brown writes, democracy "has never been more conceptually footloose and substantively hollow" (Brown 2009: 44). For Brown, particularly worrisome is the neoliberal-capitalist stranglehold on democracy. Corporate and state power are welded by more than haphazard catalysis: State power is *designed* to support the accumulation of capital, undermining democratic practices of popular rule, canalizing democrats' dwindling energies into bread and circuses (the spectacle of the 2016 presidential election illustrates this perfectly). "Powerless to say no to capital's needs, they [the populace] mostly watch passively as their own are abandoned" (Brown 2009: 47). Neoliberal emphases on costs, benefits, productivity and the market undermine the importance of democratic principles such as freedom and equality. Suspension of rights and racial profiling are ascribed to the exigencies of the security state. What is worse: "the majority of Westerners have come to prefer moralizing, consuming, conforming, luxuriating, fighting, simply being told what to be, think, and do over the task of authoring their own lives (Brown 2009: 55).[1] Given this assessment of democracy, to pin our lives on such a concept seems delusional.

For Jodi Dean and Alain Badiou, championing democracy sidelines a rigorous leftist critique of capitalism. As Badiou writes, the literal meaning of democracy is "the power of peoples over their own existence," and for him, this will only come to fruition,

[1] See also Brown, "Neo-liberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy," where she argues that the ideals of "democracy" give cover to the workings of an insidious and pervasive neoliberal market rationality. In neoliberalism, "the body politic ceases to be a body but is, rather, a group of individual entrepreneurs and consumers" (Brown 2003: 7). Neoliberalism signals the death of liberal democracy as we knew it. Instead, democracy is refigured as a ubiquitous entrepreneurialism.

“we will only ever be true democrats[,]…when we become communists” (Badiou 2009: 15). Dean sees less in the very term democracy—both as evoked by the left and by democratic theorists who implicitly assume no alternative. As Dean writes: "Calling for democracy, leftists fail to emphasize the divisions necessary for politics, divisions that should lead us to organize against the interests of corporations and their stockholders, against the values of fundamentalists and individualists, and on behalf of collectivist arrangements designed to redistribute benefits and opportunities more equitably” (Dean 2009: 76). As she reminds us, "existing constitutional democracies privilege the wealthy" and protect a neoliberal capitalism that oppresses the underprivileged even as it expands a middle-class brand of hope that everyone can believe in (ibid). Democracy, I would add, is not only a neoliberal fantasy—allowing us to believe that democratic participation will help change an oppressive economic and social system—but a liberal one. For example, Stephen White writes that political liberalism “takes shape, albeit tacitly, around a sense of the moderate well-being (both economically and politically) of large portions of the population in Western, liberal democracies” and that this is partly to blame for an inadequate sensitivity to or ability to alleviate the “substantial suffering on the part of other segments [of a state’s population]” (White 2001: 183-184). There is little hope that democratic participation alone will help change an oppressive economic and social system.

Adding to these academic worries are pronouncements in the popular press regarding the democracy’s loss of momentum in the 21st Century (“What’s Gone Wrong,” 2014; Plattner 2015). The number of democratic countries seems to have reached its peak in the second half of the 20th century, but that progress seems to have

stalled in the past 16 years. With China's rise, Putin's power consolidation, and the Arab spring's failures, democracy looks less and less attractive as a state model, especially for capitalist states that value efficiency and swift legislative action. Countries that had made healthy democratic strides 20 years ago have descended into forms of despotism, one-party rule, or electoral chaos: Turkey, South Africa, Bangladesh, and Thailand, for example. Extremist, populist candidates in France, Austria, Greece, and the Netherlands demonstrate the drawbacks of popular rule. Even the US, with its long, illustrious democratic history, does not make a very desirable case for this system of rule. Party polarization, gerrymandering, and campaign finance regulations that allow wealthy donors to shape politics make all too visible democracy's weaknesses.

But if, according to these pronouncements about democracy, the house is on fire, this dissertation takes a turn at the pump. But it is important first to clarify what I mean by democracy, as democracy is a constellation of (contested) concepts. Am I concerned with freedom of the press, human dignity, universal suffrage, rule of law, freedom, fair elections? The main concept in democracy I wish to draw out, the primary value within the multivalent "democracy" to which I give priority, is equality. I do this despite the fact that, as Brown writes, "the promise of *modern* democracy has always been freedom" as opposed to a premodern, republican emphasis on the principle of equality (Brown 2009: 51, emphasis original). I take equality to be the most important perhaps because it is one of the least practiced and most difficult to implement elements of democracy today—further undermined by a capitalist system that awards those already on the top of the hierarchy.[2]

[2] It should go without saying, I view democratic equality as distinct from capitalism. If there is an equality central to capitalism, it is more this idea that everyone is equally vulnerable to capitalist "risk, threat, and

If our democratic practices are not self-activating (as they seem not to be just looking at the empirical data), if we need periodically to cultivate a set of spirited virtues[3] to enliven those practices, how can we best do that? What exemplars can we turn to for inspiration, as guides? How can we best motivate broad-scale democratic empowerment?

This project is indebted to Sharon Krause's work (2002) that answers similar questions. Her book *Liberalism with Honor* responds to a problem she has diagnosed in neoliberal society today, the sobering insight that we have lost faith in individual agency. Krause seeks to invigorate the civic sources of liberal democracy by affirming honor as both a code of conduct and a quality of character that can motivate us to act well as liberal democratic citizens. Part of the problem for Krause is the era we are living in—one in which, she claims, we have lost the ability to conceive of honor or great sacrifice for the good of the nation as a motivation to action: "an era in which we have forgotten how to connect sacrifice to personal ambition, or higher purposes to self-concern. Honor, perhaps more than any other quality, combines them" (Krause 2002: 173). As Krause shows with her reading of Dr. King, democracies sometimes need exceptional citizens to lead them toward the realization of their democratic ideals.[4] My project offers a different set of solutions than Krause's. Instead of great citizens to inspire others, I focus on dramatic actors and their techniques to help reinvigorate democratic agency.

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ongoing anxiety"—which comes to stand in for what "democracy" is supposed to mean (Berlant 2011: 203). It is a "democratic" equality to vulnerability in capitalism. Everyone can fail, even the richest businessman. This is the new bar to assess if something is equal: the equal opportunity to achieve failure. Berlant: "finally the wealthy are experiencing the material and sensual fragilities and unpredictability that have long been distributed to the poor and socially marginal" (Berlant 2011: 195). While I value vulnerability in democratic deliberation and exchange, my idea of a more substantive equality would mean recognition as a human being with a dignity and worth equal to other human beings.

[3] I use the term virtue and practice interchangeably and discuss virtues in more detail below, in my third section of this introduction.

[4] Although I too focus on courage, Krause is more focused in her study than I will be on unique acts of heroism that can revitalize and change our American democracy. I am interested less in unique acts of bravery or courage that lead to serious change than in the potential for courage to create a general mood and *ethos* of equality in which all citizens can exercise democratic agency.

When I speak of democracy in this dissertation, I speak of democracy capaciously understood. I refer to an *ethos* more than to a technical system of government. I consider it an assemblage, a relational network of and between ideas and forces (the value I most privilege in this assemblage being, again, equality). I hold up as laudable for 21st democracy, characters who trigger nascent democratic assemblages in their communities. By "democratic assemblage," I mean to mark not a coherent stable entity that represents The Democratic but rather a manifold arrangement of bodies and styles and signs and visions temporally diverse, spanning space and time, interacting with both democratic and nondemocratic elements in *affectively democratic* ways—that is, the *moods* are democratic in the mere fact of moods and characters' emotions being changeable. No one is stuck or static, caught in a hierarchy or a singular, monological existence. Each character blends into a whole—not a constricting or conformist "oneness" but rather an assemblage of manifold actualities. I wish to think "democracy" in its plural, deindividualized forms, "the democratic" as something of a hybrid construction pieced together out of a motley elements, formed as a thing that mutates and expands with the times and the contexts and the characters—a sort of flexible monster conglomeration, both within a self and between selves. The equality that democracy entails also argues for democracy's inclusionary aspects. The democratic can open out to encompass the whole, distinct and varied bodies and affects and disguises. In situations examined in this dissertation, characters often playfully adopt ways of being at odds with their staid, normal ways of being, sometimes at odds with their noble or otherwise privileged selves. They possesses what C.L. Barber (1990) calls the power of redefinition. They courageously resist authority, a resistance that stems from breaking free from any one

identity category. They are actorly. As Barber notes of Falstaff, "It is the essence of his character, and his role, in *Part One*, that he never comes to rest where we can see him for what he 'is.' He is always in motion, always adopting postures, assuming characters' (Barber 1990: 198). I argue that democracy requires empathy, vulnerability, and ways of being to cultivate new moods, a playfulness to resist oppressive forms of authority, and that it is best to conceive of democracy as an assemblage in order to demonstrate these points.

This dissertation is concerned with bringing to attention the ways in which Shakespeare's theater gives us access to experiences that could allow us to imagine new democratic practices or techniques of the self. These Renaissance characters, while not democratic, set as they are against a background of aristocratic absolutism, nonetheless hold potential as exemplars for improving our own democracy. At bottom this dissertation is concerned with the lived or everyday mechanics and requisites for maintaining a healthy democracy, or reviving one. While I believe that lively debate is a crucial element for a thriving democracy, unlike Habermas, I do not believe that untruths sap the vigor of American public discussion. Rather, I make the case to view dramatic acting as a practice that helps aid, and the theater as a central forum for, democratic exchange and togetherness.

I see role-playing, courage, optimism, and overhearing as a set of democratic practices that I argue can help revitalize democracy, analyzing themes from Shakespeare with and against contemporary theorists such as Lauren Berlant, Jacques Ranciere, and Jürgen Habermas. A central thesis of this dissertation, a braid of ideas taken from or in response to Habermas, Berlant, and Ranciere, is that theater and its techniques can

provides us with and revitalize a dialogic model of democratic discourse that aids the process of subject-formation, the recognition of those with *logos*. I argue that Shakespeare's writing gives us access to dramatizations of experiences and rich characterizations of human beings that can allow us to imagine democratic ideals in fresh and exciting new ways. In other words, I use the way Shakespeare dramatizes certain experiences or events in order to help me think anew about democratic virtues. Part of my aim in searching through Shakespeare for democratic models of being stems from a desire to appropriate Shakespeare for our own time, to make him relevant politically for us.

Shakespeare's work has its historical origins in a political context of absolutist monarchy.[5] I am less interested in speculation over Shakespeare's political leanings or his intentions—Was he a republican? Or a strict monarchist? (He was surely quite conservative in the way he portrayed the lower classes as ignorant)—and more interested in how certain strains of his thought might be valuable for democrats today.[6] I seek to go beyond readings of Shakespeare in a democratic or republican tradition by a closer focus on situations or scenes within his work that can disclose lessons for fostering an egalitarianism of style. When relevant, I mine the creative appropriations of Shakespeare's works by American directors, actors, and novelists over the past century, especially those who adapt Shakespeare to democratic ends.

[5] There are scholars who argue, however that while aristocratic power was staged at the English Renaissance playhouse, the democratic elements afoot at the theater or at least "collaborative conditions of Renaissance drama" should not be ignored (Stallybrass and Kastan 1991: 10). See also Patterson 1989.
[6] Besides, books on democracy may draw on non-democratic sources. As Jill Frank says of (anti-democratic) Aristotle's work: "it opens the way to a particularly dynamic form of democracy that can accommodate the reciprocal relation between institutions and citizens" (Frank 2005: 8).

Uniting each chapter is a counter-intuitive quality. For example, in the acting chapter, I emphasize creative responsiveness, vulnerability, being open to the other and the "becomings" that happen when Bottom stages his show for the aristocrats. I emphasize how acting makes you more sincere (because you are more vulnerable and responsive to the other person). In the courage chapter, I argue that *acting* courageous, *especially if you are a coward*, can be a kind of courage, one more helpful for democracy. In the optimism chapter, I look to the optimism of villains, although villains are not usually associated with much that is positive. In the overhearing chapter, I challenge the common sense belief that what is overheard is more true or less manipulated.

Shakespeare and Democracy

I am not the first to suggest Shakespeare's value to democrats. Orson Welles' 1937 production of *Julius Caesar* is one of the most effective deployments of a Shakespeare play for democratic ends. Staging and editing the play to give it ripped-from-the-headlines relevance, he laid it in Fascist Italy and subtitled it "The Death of a Dictator." Welles added lines from *Coriolanus* and fabricated his own to associate Brutus with democratic government and Caesar with rising autocrat Benito Mussolini. Brutus represents the fulfillment of history's *telos* from absolutism to modern republican democracy. In Welles' treatment, Brutus was "an almost saintly man, a man ever fixed in principle and faithful to his conscience," a courageous dissident standing firm for democracy (Whipple 2014: 442).

German-born American academic Alwin Thaler also turned to Shakespeare in wartime. In his book *Shakespeare and Democracy* (1941), he cites a 1940 report of the German news service complaining of British propaganda in the US to which one

commentator replies: “the greatest propagandist that the British have lies peacefully in his grave. His name is Shakespeare” (quoted in Thaler 1941: 4). Breasting the crushing tide of authoritarian powers, the English-speaking allied forces turned to Shakespeare at the moment when their freedom was most precarious. Thaler recommends “marshalling our spiritual resources for this struggle,” gathering comfort and inspiration “from the man who, of all ancients and moderns, ‘had the largest and most comprehensive soul’” (Thaler 1941: 9). For a liberalism that prides itself on its “myriad-mindedness,” to quote Coleridge’s famous adjective for Shakespeare, the British bard is a model (Coleridge 1907: 64). Drawing evidence from an illustrious list of early American presidents, English and American poets, Emerson, and Whitman, Thaler concludes that “Shakespeare does speak-forth prophetically something of what the heart of democracy means” (Thaler 1941: 29) and that Shakespeare cannot “safely be ignored by anyone seriously interested in the past and present of democracy” (Thaler 1941: 31).

There are two dimensions to this valuation of Shakespeare: moral/psychological and political. President John Adams calls Shakespeare “a great teacher of morality and politics” (Adams 2014: 8). Shakespeare sketches the moral conditions of a broad variety of personalities, what Whitman refers to as “splendid personalizations” which could serve “as models of Democracy” (Whitman 1902a: 137). In portraying tyrants and despots like Richard III and King John so uncompromisingly, as anti-models, Shakespeare implicitly makes the case (negatively) for republican controls of sovereigns and limitations to government over-reach—even in plays like *Richard III* where there is no voice for republican government *per se* as we find in the Roman plays and in particular, *Julius Caesar*. If we see his plays as briefs supporting limited government power, then we can

also locate his plays historically as precursors to constitutional order and, eventually, republican democracy.

Such was the way Walt Whitman came to read the plays, particularly the histories. It is true that Whitman famously called for American poets to create new models for the democratic sensibility, rejecting Old World ideas and standards of beauty (including by name Shakespeare), but he also advised us pay heed to "the most important and pregnant principle of all, *viz*.: that *Art is one* [and] includes all times and forms and sorts—is not exclusively aristocratic or democratic or oriental or occidental" (Whitman 1902b: 86). The advance of democracy requires that Shakespeare's work came before, to signal the need for new forms of government and new moral sensibilities to match them. In his history plays, Whitman argues, Shakespeare "put[s] on record the first full exposé…of the political theory and results…which America has come on earth to abnegate and replace" (Whitman 1964: 555). To Whitman, these plays point towards and demonstrate the "necessity" of modern democracy. In these historical plays, according to Whitman, Shakespeare demonstrates a conscious plan to undermine the old order, to expose its hypocrisies and cruelties. Whitman sought the "real purpose and meaning" of the plays, purposely "veil'd" (Whitman 1964: 555).

In this uncovering work—unearthing a "secret plan" on Shakespeare's part—Whitman helps advance a goal of his contemporary, American antebellum writer Delia Bacon. Although Bacon was part of the anti-Stratfordians who cast doubt on Shakespeare's authorship, attributing his works instead to Sir Francis Bacon, she agreed with Whitman that the plays express hidden meanings that can be decoded as attacks on monarchy and arbitrary power. Although Whitman reads the plays in light of a

democratic future, while Bacon sees the plays as supporting republican government and self-governing individuals, both see in Shakespeare the theory that "the State is composed throughout...of individual men...clothed of nature with the same faculties and essential human dignities..." (Bacon 1857: 208). At the heart of both arguments is the belief that the best state places the interest of the individual human being first and foremost. Bacon expounded her reading of *King Lear*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Coriolanus* in her 582-page tome, *The Philosophy of Shakespeare's Plays Unfolded* (1857). As in Welles's production, for Bacon as well, Brutus is the hero, champion of republican ideals that set a sharp (if anachronistic) contrast to the Tudor and Stuart monarchies of the time.

Helen Hackett has argued that "the appropriation of Shakespeare by Americans was especially energetic at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth" (Hackett 2009: 175). These American Shakespeares were often antiauthoritarian, painting Shakespeare as a more progressive American than he ever could be as an adherent of British monarchy. Some of these readings also expressed, according to Heckett, "the desire to challenge the ancient cultural predominance of Britain" (ibid). Granting Shakespeare American citizenship seemed a logical way to do so. In insisting on Shakespeare's distance from British culture and political life, Shakespeare could be used by Americans not only to fight British cultural preeminence but to develop their own culture as well. Frances Teague argues that Shakespeare helped early Americans "form a national identity" (Teague 2006: 39).

Not only could Shakespeare be an American (proto-) democrat and republican, but he could take on these modern identities because he was read through the times. Thaler, writing in the midst of World War II, challenges his reader to "reread

Shakespeare for himself in the light of what is now going on in the world and of what is promised or threatened for to-morrow" (Thaler 1941: 35). Jan Kott's *Shakespeare, Our Contemporary* (1964) makes a similar case to apply Shakespeare to post-war Europe. *Hamlet* "immediately absorbs all the problems of our time," Kott writes. "What matters is that through Shakespeare's text we ought to get at our modern experience, anxiety and sensibility" (Kott 1964: 57, 53). Closer to our own time, Annabel Patterson's *Shakespeare and the Popular Voice* (1989) presents Shakespeare's attitude to order, like Thaler and Kott, in light of our present realities. She has been attacked by critics for presenting a "vision of the Bard as a Jeffersonian democrat" (Wilson 2014: 17) and for enlisting Shakespeare as a "contemporary" spokesman for liberal politics (Arnold 2007: 11). Although, to be fair to Patterson, her readings contain rigorous historical analyses as she situates Shakespeare in his time. Nonetheless, the disagreements between her view of Shakespeare as proto-democratic and those who regard this view as anachronistic and wrong indicate the controversy surrounding Shakespeare's politics. That Shakespeare was claimed so fervently during World War II by the Americans and British as an ally in the cause of republican democracy does not negate the fact that he was claimed by Nazi scholars during this time too, as dramatist of their own political beliefs (Symington 2005; Thaler 1941).

In the early twentieth and late nineteenth centuries especially, Americans who claimed Shakespeare for democracy tend towards both an anthropocentrism and also sometimes a religiously Christian bent—both of which will be challenged in my study. As for the first characterization, consider American Shakespeare scholar Charles William Wallace's rather dramatic pronouncement that:

> Shakespeare and America were born together, twinned at a single birth, children of the same ideal, and have for each other a companionship of spirit now possessed in common with no other nation. America alone still retains the broad outlook consonant with the spirit that begot both in those days when men of the Old World looked to the West where a man might lift up his head and say, as we do now, even with the kings of the earth, 'I am a Man' (Wallace quoted in Robinson 1979: 12-13).

For Wallace, writing in 1914, Shakespeare is American insofar as he believes firmly in American freedoms, the "broad outlook" of its settlers, and the dignity and rights of "Man," with the M capitalized perhaps to emphasize his divine nature. For Wallace, Shakespeare's advocacy of freedom for the individual begot the American ideal. Thaler defines "democracy" as manifest in Shakespeare's cannon in a similar fashion: He says, "democracy, like Christianity, is built upon the rock: the supreme validity of the individual soul" (Thaler 1941: 7). Thaler's argument hinges on the claim that Shakespeare "believed in God and man" (Thaler 1941: 44). These readings privilege permanence and stability, being and eternity, over becoming and theories of change. They privilege the subject of rights and freedoms, his and her (mainly his) individualism, over a vaguer and more general mood or *ethos* of equality in the commons.

My dissertation will challenge this equation of democracy with either the freedom of the Christian soul or of the individual man by looking at acting as a democratic virtue. Acting is a practice, a skill, a technique that can enrich democracy. I will not, however, challenge the aspects of these readings of Shakespeare that see him as a champion, in his own fashion, of basic notions of equality and fairness that came to be seen as essential to modern democracy. Although writing in a different historical time, Shakespeare offers us unique, creative ideas for fostering our democracy. It is true that, as Paul Kottman says about his similar modern-day application of Shakespeare's plays, these dramatic works

> have their origins in linguistic and historical contexts utterly different from our own; however, the decision to refer to these texts arises from the hunch that contemporary problems cannot be adequately addressed in purely contemporary terms, and that seemingly foreign or antiquated words, categories or experiences have a surprisingly transformative power when expropriated in certain ways (Kottman 2008: 18).

This is my wager too—that the transformative power of the experiences of Shakespeare's characters can teach us about democracy in the 21st century where more situated, timely, or contemporary analyses fall short. Lessons from his plays involving aristocratic characters can be adjusted to serve a democratic order.

Although this is the first project to offer sustained reflection on Shakespeare's plays to propose that they offer a subset of undertheorized American political virtues—theatrical acting, a playful kind of courage, optimism, and cultivating what Nietzsche calls a "third ear"—it is indebted to a great variety of research that has preceded it (Nietzsche 1966: 182). Another, more recent primary influence has been those scholars who presented Shakespeare as a marker of multivalent meanings, as anything but fixed and stable—including those who recovered the variety of American renderings of Shakespeare (e.g., Busse 2006; Shapiro 2014; Smith 2001; Smith 2004; Thompson 2011). Since the earliest performances of Shakespeare, there has been an improvisatory element to his texts: they were never approached as final and complete by even the first adaptors of his plays (Johanson 2013). True to how he has been appropriated in performance situations, then, I seek to render Shakespeare as contingent, playing differently to various times and places. In pursuing Shakespeare as a political, highly contingent figure, able to speak to American political concerns, I aim to invite not only scholarly reflection and dialogue but action as well, to usher open new avenues for engaging our contemporary realities.

One last word regarding Shakespeare and politics. Within the political theory canon, Shakespeare is "minor." Deleuze writes, "Is there not…great interest in submitting authors considered major to treatment as minor authors, in order to rediscover their potential for becoming? Shakespeare, for example?" (Deleuze 1997: 208). When we do this, Deleuze says, unexpected potentialities, fresh multiplicities emerge when the "active minoritarian force" is "rediscovered" in Shakespeare (ibid). The majoritarian normalizes. The minor includes being disgraced and deformed—like hunchbacked Richard III, a character examined in my chapter on villains. Actors, I argue, minoritize. The audience, the actor, the scenery becomes "disorganized, disarticulated" (Deleuze and Guattari 2000: 280) as they blend with the world around them, as they find themselves set within and forced to respond to a series of performative, contextual, or affective relations. I am interested in applying this Deleuzean system in which subject, event, cause, and effect all enter into mutual interaction and transform each other into new multiplicities.

Virtues/Practices and Conceptions of Selfhood

I isolate four democratic practices or virtues in Shakespeare's work. By using the term "virtue," I draw on Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* (1981). MacIntyre's book represents the mainstream approach to the question of democratic virtue, and, as such, helps me to highlight what is distinctive about my own approach to the topic. MacIntyre laments the evisceration of the language of morality and describes post-Enlightenment ethics as incoherent. But what if incoherence were celebrated as a condition for the emergence of something new—as opening the ground up for a new experience of and connection between the virtues? Democracy in the 21st century requires, I will argue, a more sensitive attunement to new assemblages of meaning and ethics, as well as a greater

appreciation of skills like acting, eavesdropping, playfulness and optimism. Furthermore, "it was rarely essences and centralities which the drama of the English Renaissance most powerfully staged, but inversions, perversions, the local maneuvers of dressing up and of masquerade" (Stallybrass and Kastan 1991: 11). For MacIntyre, such masquerade and perversion—and the art of acting—clearly does not belong within the sphere of virtue and ethics.

I locate myself (and my reading of Shakespeare) in-between Alasdair MacIntyre's work on virtues as practices and Erving Goffman's work on the self as a product of dramaturgy (Goffman 1973). For Alasdair MacIntyre, the idea of acting as a virtue, the central argument of this dissertation, would be nonsense. Only a whole, consistent self can contain virtue. Our soul has a unified disposition that fits into a hierarchical order of selves. Opposed to MacIntyre's conception of the self, dramaturgy theory in sociology argues that we all play roles, that there is no essential self. I discuss Erving Goffman as representative of this view. My view shares elements from both theorists.

MacIntyre holds the rather strong thesis that role-playing simply cannot be a virtue. "The unity of a virtue in someone's life is intelligible only as a characteristic of a unitary life, a life that can be conceived and evaluated as a whole" (MacIntyre 1981: 205). It is only the nasty effect of modern individualism, of liberal, market-driven utilitarianism, that the self becomes experienced as detachable from this wholeness. Against liberal individualism, MacIntye argues that "the Aristotelian tradition can be restated in a way that restores intelligibility and rationality to our moral and social attitudes and commitments" (MacIntyre 1981: 259). The Aristotelian tradition of the virtues quests for "*the* good and *the* best," standards made according to the community in which shared

values are rooted (MacIntyre 1981: 275, emphasis original). There is no individual with his own conception of the good; rather, "it is always part of an ordered community that I have to seek the human good" (MacIntyre 1981: 173). But in Shakespeare's world, just as in ours, there is not always in place "a shared background foundation for moral discourse and action," which is the setting for MacIntyre's Aristotelian account of the virtues (MacIntyre 1981: 50). This is what *King Lear* dramatizes, where a Christian universe comes up against Gloucester's "As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods" (*King Lear* 4.1.37).[7] In that play, Edgar and Edmund embody this rupture and give voice to these contradictory worldviews. It is also present in *Coriolanus*.

MacIntyre does, however, allow for an understanding of a virtue as a practice. Although he believes in a community of shared ideals, a community that decides what the prized virtues are, the *telos* of virtue shifts as one seeks the good. "To move towards the good is to move in time and that movement may itself involve new understandings of what it is to move towards the good" (MacIntyre 1981: 176). MacIntyre's conception of the shifting *telos* follows from his understanding of a virtue as a practice; indeed, his definition sounds a lot like an art, because the agreed-upon standard of excellence shifts as artists develop their craft.

> By a 'practice' I am going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definite of, that form of activity, *with the result that human powers to achieve excellence*, and human conceptions of the ends and good involved, *are systematically extended* (MacIntyre 1981: 187, my emphasis).

[7] All references to Shakespeare are to Shakespeare 2008. References to *King Lear* are hereafter abbreviated as *Lr*. I cite from the conflated text.

The goal of a practice or virtue moves when great people set the standards of excellence anew: “Practices never have a goal or goals fixed for all time—painting has no such goal nor has physics—but the goals themselves are transmuted by the history of the activity” (MacIntyre 1981: 193-194). As I will show in my first chapter on acting, this also holds true for the practices of the stage. Practices also elevate the lives of the entire community: “the pursuit of excellence in a way that extends human powers is at the heart of human life” (MacIntyre 1981: 199). Jill Frank describes this position: “virtue (no less than vice) is acquired and maintained, or lost, by practice. Not a static trait of character, something one has or lacks, it is better understood not simply as a noun but also as a verb” (Frank 2005: 13). Acting is a practice and a virtue, then, that develops creative responsiveness, a practice sensitive to one’s surroundings, without a fixed goal or standard. Standards must be flexible to shift in shifting environments, evolving and developing based on context.

Although I agree with MacIntyre that virtues can serve the advancement of common life, I part ways with his claim that there is only one standard of excellence. The Aristotelian tradition of the virtues that quests for *the* good and *the* best, on MacIntyre’s account, are standards out of place in pluralist, democratic communities. The acting methods discussed here are experimental strivings, strolls along winding trackways and hedgerows rather than sprints to a known, albeit developing, destination. Although MacIntyre does acknowledge that our standards of excellence shift as practitioners of the virtues re-orient themselves towards their goal, and as achievements advance, to the extent that he posits a community in control of those standards, his moral vision is simply too limited to be applicable in today’s multicultural society. There is a slightly different questing after the good needful today: You gaze at one goal, but as you advance in its

direction, it looks slightly different. Disruptive events happen. Every insight into the future rests on uncertainty. Maps are useless. As in whitewater rafting, you dip your oar in the roiling waters to avoid crashing into the rocks, and you can see just a bit further down the river. But never all the way. There is always a questing, a trajectory, a teleology—but without finalism, as Bergson would say (Bergson 2007). You can't set precise standards in advance because in our world, standards regarding "the good" are multiple and competing.

This stance need not dissolve into the radical individualism MacIntyre believes it must. Just because there is no unanimous agreement on standards of excellence to guide creative responders does not leave us with a human being creating her or his own virtues in a vacuum, apart from any community whatsoever. MacIntyre posits a straw man here, a product of liberal individualist modernity (MacIntyre 1981: 259). That straw man takes shape in sociological theorist Erving Goffman (MacIntyre 1981: 115). For Goffman, socially approved role-playing, the performances of everyday life, constitutes one's identity. Goffman's self could never carry Aristotelian virtues because "the liquidation of the self into a set of demarcated areas of role-playing allows no scope for the exercise of dispositions which could genuinely be accounted virtues in any sense remotely Aristotelian" (MacIntyre 1981: 205). There must be consistency to the virtue, as it strives toward the *telos* always, not just in some situations or contexts. From Goffman's perspective, MacIntyre exhibits what is commonly viewed as the modern lament for the lack of a single coherent identity, what Peter Gay has called "a hunger for wholeness"

(cited in Cmiel 1990: 93).[8] From MacIntyre's perspective, Goffman's floorboards-giving-way model of subjectivity empties the modern self of any potential for virtue.

There are, however, some insights from Goffman's work I would like to apply here. And, *pace* MacIntyre, I do believe we can have virtue without "wholeness"—indeed, it is my argument that acting is a gateway virtue for the possession of additional virtues.[9] While Goffman does speak of "a man behind the mask," he believes the self is a product of dramaturgy (Goffman 1973: 212). At the conclusion of his study, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, he writes that:

> In this report the performed self was seen as some kind of image, usually creditable, which the individual on stage and in character effectively attempts to induce others to hold in regard to him. While this image is entertained *concerning* the individual, so that a self is imputed to him, this self itself does not derive from its possessor, but from the whole scene of his action, being generated by that attribute of local events which renders them interpretable by witnesses. A correctly staged and performed scene leads the audience to impute a self to a performed character, but this imputation—this self—is a *product* of a scene that comes off, and is not a *cause* of it. The self, then, as a performed character, is not an organic thing that has a specific location, whose fundamental fate is to be born, to mature, and to die; it is a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented, and the characteristic issue, the crucial concern, is whether it will be credited or discredited (Goffman 1973: 252-253, emphasis original).

A self is not more or less "true" or "organic"—it is only more or less credible from others' viewpoints. Goffman is concerned with the self as a dramatic effect arising from a situation, an event, or a scene. We project a self onto those we interact with, but our

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[8] "Rousseau, Hegel, Coleridge, Marx, and others both of the left and the right have exhibited what Peter Gay has called a 'hunger for wholeness,' the dream of reintegrating man into a unified whole" (93). These, like MacIntyre, are reactionaries against modernity's fragmentation.

[9] This idea of a virtue that is prerequisite to the others, I take from MacIntyre. He describes the virtue of constancy in Jane Austen's work and *phronesis* in Aristotle's in this way: "In some ways constancy plays a role in Jane Austen analogous to that of *phronesis* in Aristotle; it is a virtue the possession of which is a prerequisite for the possession of other virtues" (MacIntyre 1981: 183). I think methods of response nurtured by acting techniques are prerequisite to the other practices of democratic character I discuss: courage; optimism; and the virtue of hearing green, or repartitioning the sensible via overhearing—because role-playing helps one achieve those three more fully (as the characters held up as exemplars in these situations show).

judgments of them do not stem from any true self within. Goffman says that an individual might *believe* in the truth of him- or herself, but fundamentally, we are all actors due to the nature of social interaction in our society. "[T]he very obligation and profitability of appearing always in a steady moral light, of being a socialized character, *forces one to be the sort of person who is practiced in the ways of the stage*" (Goffman 1973: 251, my emphasis). This person, the self as dramatic effect of the scene, is the dramatic effect of the event.

Not only is the self a projection of his or her environment, but, as Luigi Pirandello knew, our personalities are fluid despite our obstinate belief that they are fixed and stable. As his character Father says in *Six Characters in Search of an Author*:

> There is not a 'you,' only a shifting set of vanishing atoms that make up a myriad of 'you's. ... [Y]ou cling to the illusion of a consistent presence—your unchanging truth—but you are no more than twenty-four tiny truths a second—a set of flickering flames... (Pirandello 2014: 94).

It is the techniques of acting that allow us to draw out these different selves, and to eventually become better democrats, more empathetic, more sensitive to our surroundings, cognizant of how those surroundings, and how others, change us. Our subjectivity has no immutable foundation. As Marie and Pierre Curie did when they ground up and separated samples of pitchblende time and time again in a painstaking and excruciating process to eventually discover the new elements polonium and radium, the actor analyzes, dissolves, and discovers elements of themselves, new dimensions of their personality. Discovering something new requires separating out the various aspects of oneself to see the new elements.

I hope the foregoing has made clear my rejection of any fantasy of self-ontogenesis grounded on a disavowal of subjects' dependence on others, their

environments, and their histories. And, as my discussion of Habermas in my first chapter will make clear, I do not accept the view of the autonomous subject of instrumental reason. However, as I discuss in my chapter on tragic optimism, for some of Shakespeare's villains, a fantasy of sovereign selfhood should not always be dismissed as worthless. I seek the middle-ground between MacIntyre's Aristotelian unified soul on one hand and Goffman's role-playing and masks on the other—but all from the perspective of the actor. In other words, not to necessarily undermine that dichotomy but to capture it from another angle.

Chapter-By-Chapter Breakdown

In the first chapter, "'Sometimes I Mean Things So Much I Have To Act': Rethinking Communicative Action," I push back against the work of Habermas. Liberal models of democratic citizenship, from Rawls to Habermas, believe that when deliberating, rational citizens should not practice deception. For example, for Rawls, the conception of justice as fairness must be constructed from first principles that must not be misrepresented (Rawls 1999). I argue, however, the practice of acting, or playful misrepresentation, helps citizens to encounter unsettling circumstances in daily life; respond to others in more open, genuine ways; and expand the relatively stable repertoire of selves each person cultivates through life.

Open and sincere dialogue is central to discourse ethics, and Habermas assumes that people will seek agreement on fundamental truths, and that they will do this by not lying. In Habermas's "ideal speech situation," each utterance conveys a "rational will in relation to a common interest ascertained *without deception*" (Habermas 1975: 108, my emphasis). A rationally willing subject will be comprehensible, first and foremost (that is

his primary validity claim). But even when a subject cannot rationally understand, that subject may feel differently after an utterance, the utterance may affect his mood—and surely that difference in *feeling* is a part of communication. Also, regarding Habermas's fear of deception: What about the "lies like truth" that happen in the theater (*Macbeth*: 5.5.43)[10]? Actors might be affectively sincere and re-enacting a fictitious situation at the same time. Or, sometimes citizens need acting techniques to express parts of themselves otherwise concealed—for example, I argue that Cordelia would do well with acting skills in order to express her true feelings towards her father; and Coriolanus would do well with the same to gain favor with the plebeians. Characters like Coriolanus and Cordelia demonstrate the needfulness of acting skills in real life, simply to communicate certain aspects of oneself to others. We might say that Falstaff, a showman, and Coriolanus, a brave hero, have what is lacking in the other.

I put forth positive notions of theatricality and rationality without consolidating them into a theory of truth or judgment. Conceiving of democratic citizens as theatrical actors opens up the idea as agents as both scripted by dominant and dissident discourses and yet able to enact and rescript their own performances as historical agents of their own. This is one way to view the agency of actors of Shakespeare in the American context. They often—think of Welles's Brutus (*Julius Caesar* 1937), or the prominent nineteenth-century Shakespearean actor Edwin Forrest's radical restaging of *Othello* without an Iago (*Othello* 1826), or Baz Luhrmann's hip, updated *Romeo + Juliet* (1996)—rescripted Shakespeare for a new time and place. In this chapter, I explore the democratic potential for theatrical role-playing to develop the capacity within selves for a responsiveness to others by broadening one's creative experiences. There are several models of role-

[10] References to *Macbeth* are hereafter abbreviated as *Mac*.

playing: stylized, artificial forms, tradition and conventions, gestures studied and unfelt but painted in broad strokes; early 20th century techniques that seek after veracity and loath the artificial and posed as meaningless; and a style of self-conscious acting where the theater's machinations are exposed for all to see. I theorize the democrat as an excitable actor who triggers modes of interaction that further the aims and sentiments of the democratic community—this is especially true of Bottom from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Bottom's hijinks and shenanigans, his multiple and sometimes forestalled "becomings," can help elaborate possibilities for a contemporary *ethos* of democracy, an equality in the *style* of our interactions with each other. Admittedly, we are not all born with acting talents, but the variety of different acting styles ensures that there are practices for everyone to cultivate.

Whereas Hamlet and Habermas regard the theater as a vehicle to behold actors offering nature a "mirror," (*Hamlet* 3.2.20)[11] Bottom and Deleuze expose the myth that theatrical dramatization can ever be stable repetition of an image. Dramatization is always about becoming and process rather than being and stability. This is partly why some Renaissance audiences and dramatists found the theater so menacing. By moralists, the theater was seen as a school for vice and mendacity, not least of all because greatness of stature and position could be faked and often was on the Renaissance stage, underscoring the social order's constructed quality in a way that upsets the purported naturalism of an aristocratic social order. Phillip Stubbes complained, "it is verie hard to knowe who is noble, who is worshipful, who is a gentleman, who is not" at the playhouse (cited in Stallybrass and Kastan 1991: 9). Further, there was a pronounced self-consciousness about role-playing—e.g., Cleopatra's fear that "I shall see / Some

[11] References to *Hamlet* are hereafter abbreviated as *Ham*.

squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness" (*Antony and Cleopatra* 5.2.215-6). James Edward Siemon goes so far as to call such role-creation and disguise "a consistent feature of Renaissance dramatic thought" (Siemon 1975: 106). I examine this strain of "Renaissance dramatic thought" in several plays of Shakespeare, against contemporary theorists of philosophy and the theater, to reclaim acting for American democracy today.

Moreover, acting can extend our basic knowledges, perceptions, and judgements, offering a deepened intensity of affect. Acting can foster a richer, more robust democratic citizenry given the theater's capacity to create new dispositions, expansive atmospheres, unexpected values, dynamic assemblages, and disorderly participations. Adopting the character of another person also fosters empathy and allows for greater self-understanding, which is important, I argue, to the politics of a multi-cultural, pluralistic society. Acting also develops what DuBois calls "wide judgment" and hails as essential to freedom (DuBois quoted in Rogers 2012: 195). It broadens our capacity for judgment, one's capacity to "see feelingly," not just rationally. In asking what potential acting holds for a more participatory democracy, for more engaged deliberative discussions, this chapter serves as a springboard for the rest of the dissertation. Each chapter discusses a central character who is an actor.

The second chapter, "Comic courage," argues that the quality of courage changes based on the genre in which it appears. Courage, as depicted by political theorists, takes on a tragic or heroic cast. I make the case for what I call comic courage in a playful mood. This demands acting skills. It takes courage to take on the role of pretend courage because you do not know where it will lead; there is uncertainty as to its effects. Here I first examine the martial, tragic courage of Julius Caesar and the melodramatic courage

of Hamlet and Brutus. I draw on Derrida's links between justice, revenge, and ghosts to delineate the difference between tragic and melodrama courage (Derrida 1993). My key exemplar of comic courage in a playful mood is Rosalind in *As You Like It*.[12] This is a courage of play-acting and mood-switching. It includes the ability to exercise control over the mood of a scene; it involves a disregard for authenticity or any forms of so-called authentic meaning; it helps create democratic assemblages by extending our repertoire of actions and the actions of those around us. The possessor of comic courage can *actively* (in every sense of the word) embrace potentially tragic events playfully.

In the third chapter, "Dissatisfied With The Now: Optimism And Equality Amid Villains," I consider equality as a mood of Shakespeare's political villains. Optimists are often portrayed as naifs: One more often thinks of innocents like Pollyanna than villains like Richard III. But in Shakespeare's plays, villains are oftentimes the optimists. For example, in *King Lear*, Edmund designates events as objects or means to his optimism ("All's meet with me" [*Lr.* 1.2.168]). What comes his way, he can fashion fit. There are no premanufactured meanings, prefabricated values. The villainous actor is not only the Machiavel, manipulating his subjects with impenetrable deception and a program of lies. He is something more, something that can be admired by democrats. I examine the political energies of this vitally affirmative mood in Shakespeare's villains by considering Edmund from *King Lear* and Richard III against contemporary theorists of optimism and happiness, Lauren Berlant and Sara Ahmed. The villains in Shakespeare's

[12] Incidentally, feminist critics have claimed that Shakespeare's female characters have privileges within a comedic genre that they lack in other genres, further claiming "the incompatibility of patriarchal and comic structures" (Riefer 1987, 144). Patriarchal society is in a fundamental conflict with comedy, because it is women who are able to control the course of the plot in comedies. "[T]he pervasiveness of chauvinism and the possibility of comic resolution are indirectly proportional. In other words, the stronger the forces of patriarchy, the less likely—or at least less convincing—comic resolution becomes" (ibid.). Consider, for example, the extent to which misogyny drives the plot of Othello. See also Bamber 1982.

plays all have an attachment to what turns out to be, by the end of the play, what Berlant calls “compromised conditions of possibility whose realization is discovered either to be impossible, sheer fantasy, or too possible, and toxic” (Berlant 2011: 24). Richard finds the objective correlative for his secret optimism in the English crown, Edmund in his father’s estate and in Goneril and Regan’s love. These attachments are “cruel” because the objects of desire threaten their well-being, but the desire for the object keeps them going, gives them something to look forward to and live for, allows them to redeem their existence. These villains do not seek happiness; they like games, which give purpose to their lives. They are "arch" villains in two senses of the word—playfully and principally. True, these villains desire to rank above others, never dislodging the hierarchical ideal in place in monarchy—but they are initially motivated by the lack of being affording basic rights of equal consideration with others they consider their equals. Shakespeare’s villains are of an almost impossible villainy, but sympathy with them is not impossible. In fact, American author Jane Smiley so identified with the villainous sisters in *King Lear* that she chose the oldest sister Goneril to narrate her novel *A Thousand Acres*, based on *King Lear* but set on an Iowan farm in the 1980s (Smiley 1991). This novel reveals a forward-looking attachment to the capitalist dream of more land and its devastating effects, and the sustaining efforts of the Goneril character and her sister to locate hope and so-called “good luck” elsewhere. What new avenues to democracy take shape when optimism provides a horizon for our dreams and experiences?

It is true, there is a tension between Berlant’s focus on optimistic *structures* and mine on affective, personal *moods*. But surely the two are related. Cruel optimism, for Berlant, helps maintain the social order. So what could a mood do? Optimism is not

bread, it cannot cure world hunger, establish world peace, or enact tangible effects on a scale that passing a law might do. It might even be detrimental if it keeps people trapped in the habitrail of trying to achieve and failing. But what is the alternative anyway to being trapped? To be optimistic is always better, I believe, than to despair—despair being only the fervor of starved expectation and hope. At worst, optimism will be futile against the domination and hierarchy of the current social order. At best, it will change that order. In cultivating optimism, one seeks to ensure that one always finds the best of a situation and tries to improve it. It need not lull anyone into complacency or acceptance of the orders that be.

Chapter four, drawing on the work of Jacques Ranciere, examines overhearing as a way to repartition the sensible. In this chapter, which focuses on *Measure for Measure,* I seek to expose how dominant ideas about representation, listening, and speaking fail to capture less normative modes of democratic exchange. Overhearing can be a kind of unauthorized, secretive reinvention of what is said. It is oppositional listening, listening as resistance. Eavesdropping undermines hermeneutic certainty. "Democratic overhearing: cultivating a 'third ear' and repartitioning the sensible" explores contemporary possibilities in the Renaissance idea of "hearing green." Bruce Smith has examined the concept of "hearing green" in Renaissance texts, which he uses to call into question the notion that the faculty of reason exists in a superior position to the senses and that the subject exists in isolation from what that subject perceives (Smith 2001; Smith 2004). To "green" a word means to dissolve it into nonsemantic sound. To hear green is to hear more than the rational. As Rousseau forcefully puts the matter: "Always to reason is the mania of small minds. Strong souls have quite another language. It is with

this language that one persuades and *makes others act*" (Rousseau 1979: 321, my emphasis). Jane P. Tompkins, in *Reader Response Criticism*, goes so far as to argue that Renaissance readers did not care about the meaning of texts—only their effects (Tompkins 1980). Hence the fears by anti-theatricalists regarding the Renaissance theater as a house of vice, corrupting audience members' moral sensibilities and unraveling the threads of decent society.

Also desiring that his readers "hear green," Nietzsche speaks of those who have "a third ear," a delicate, spiritual perceptive ability. He was attentive to—and asked his readers to be attentive to—the musicality of the spoken word, its alluring and seductive qualities. Music is "the above, beyond, and before," and the greatest books' rhythms should "dance" (Nietzsche 1966: 182). How words are packaged, the force they have upon a listener, might have unforeseen and detrimental effects (consider Othello or Gloucester): we sometimes hear what others want us to hear, or what the genre or frame suggests. Overhearing, or overlooking, in Shakespeare often goes tragically awry: consider how Cassius asks his servant to ascend to a lookout spot high on a hill to watch and describe the final battle in *Julius Caesar.* Cassius's servant thinks he sees an officer in Cassius's army being taken prisoner. Upon hearing of this sight, Cassius despairs and kills himself before news comes that his officer was not taken (*Julius Caesar* 5.3).[13] Overlooking, just as overhearing, can be misleading. Mistakes and misunderstandings often occur. We as a theater audience also "overhear," setting in motion the potential to consider the theater a place where repartitionings of the sensible happen perhaps not-so-subversively depending on the production. In hearing green, this aural and sensual dislocation, because it sets into motion an affective placelessness, there is no ground to

[13] References to *Julius Caesar* are hereafter abbreviated as *JC*.

give you your expectations or bearings. Finally, following through on arguments on acting that constitute the core of this dissertation, I consider the consequences that the character in *Measure for Measure* who does all the overhearing is a character in disguise.

Finally, my conclusion ponders the question of what exactly actorly techniques can help us with today. I look specifically at trauma and overcoming past injury: the traumas of terrorism, of modernity, of the death of god. In cultivating actorly sensitivity and responsiveness, these techniques can also be a way of working through the past. Acting engages those sympathies that are always eager for healing postures and histrionic gestures that, by overdramatizing, make things easier to bear. One of the most exciting moments of exaggeration, a balm to cover over hurt, occurs in *As You Like It* when Orlando tells Rosalind he must leave for a couple hours. She confesses at first: "Alas, dear love, I cannot lack thee two hours" (*As You Like It* 4.1.153).[14] When he re-emphasizes his engagement, she says, "Ay, go your ways, go your ways. I knew what you would prove; my friends told me as must, and I thought no less. That flattering tongue of yours won me. 'Tis but one cast away, and so, come, death! Two o'clock is your hour?" (*AYL* 4.1.156-159). Overacting is a way to cover over our real insecurities and pains—Rosalind is very disappointed in news of Orlando's impending absence—and in exaggerating, she makes it humorous and hence more bearable. Can acting help us refashion our wounds in a society where it seems that the suppression of traumatic memories in social discourse seems to be a condition of going about the daily business of living? It is my argument that acting, acting courageously, being optimistic, and eavesdropping can ultimately inspire true forms of genuine togetherness, neighbor-loving,

[14] References to *As You Like It* are hereafter abbreviated as *AYL*.

and democratic self-government. I aim to posit a vision of democratic mutuality and togetherness in light of both what Shakespeare shows us and what life in 2016 demands.

'Sometimes I Mean Things So Much I Have To Act': Rethinking Communicative Action

Consider political campaigning today. Many, including those inside the arena, have noted its overt theatricality and spectacular nature. "It's like going to the circus: You have acrobats and clowns and dancing bears" (Cruz quoted in Mascaro 2016). This would seem to confirm Habermas's thesis on the decline of the vibrant public sphere of the 1700s and what he worries is a turn toward the display of public persons. Habermas has argued that in the late 1800s, the expansion of capitalism eroded public-private distinctions, and once-active voters became passive consumers dedicated to personal consumption and private interests rather than to a vibrant democratic polity. On the one side of the dichotomy is theatrical representation of public officials; on the other, rational democratic debate. Today, we sit back and watch the show that has become politics, rather than participate in the show. With the rise of welfare state capitalism in the twentieth century,[15] companies became increasingly able to manipulate the media and governmental institutions, and "rational-critical political debate" began to disappear from public spaces (Habermas 1989: 176). Capitalism, Habermas argues, largely "relieved" the public of its democratic-deliberative functions:

> On the one hand…collectively organized private interests directly attempted to take on the form of political agency; on the other hand….parties…fused with the organs of public authority, established themselves…*above* the public whose instruments they once were. The process of the politically relevant exercise and equilibration of power now takes place directly between the private bureaucracies, special interest associations, parties, and public administration. The public as such is included only sporadically in this circuit of power, and even then it is brought in only to contribute its acclamation (ibid, emphasis original).

[15] Habermas, originally writing in 1962 (the work from which I cite was translated into English in 1989), partly credits the rise of the welfare state with the public sphere's demise. Perhaps today he would be equally concerned with the virulent forms of neoliberal capitalism at work.

Habermas laments that there is no permanent public sphere beyond sporadic, state-engineered elections. Habermas speaks with disdain of "the *staged and manipulative* effectiveness of a publicity aimed at rendering the broad population…infectiously ready for acclamation" (Habermas 1989: 211, my emphasis). The public only exists—is passively "brought in" as he says above, as if on wheels from the wings to the edges of the stage—to mindlessly applaud this "staged" publicity. Habermas here registers his anti-theatricalism. The theater and its tricks remain beyond the pale of rational, public discourse. For him, rational communication does not include the artistic. He excludes "dramaturgical action" from communicative action because it tends to be strategic (the performer is trying to influence her audience; her utterances are perlocutionary) and communicative reason cannot be strategic (Colclasure 2010).

This chapter argues that, *contra* Habermas, theatrical techniques, the tools of the actor, have a lot to offer democratic debate. This may seem like a dangerous or irresponsible argument to make at a time when there is such a lack of basic agreement on a set of factual truths in public discourse today. Even as recently as, say, the 1970s, the American public seemed more willing to agree on the basics. When Walter Cronkite said we were doing badly in Vietnam, we were doing badly in Vietnam. Today, when Tom Brokaw delivers news, large segments of Americans dismiss him as a mouthpiece for "the liberal media" (Alterman 2008). Of further worry to deliberate democrats, we have this ability today with social media to tune in to select news sources that can reinforce our wrong facts. Some today, for example, actually believe that President Obama was born in Kenya, despite having access to the factual truth (Jackson 2015). Maybe today is not the time to be defending actors and "clowns" against the Habermasian model of

communication action that emphasizes normative rightness, theoretical truth, and expressive sincerity.

But acting skills can be essential for the tasks of genuine expressiveness, the actions with which we express ourselves in public. Acting makes us more sincere, vulnerable, responsive, and it takes courage.[16] *Pace* Plato's arguments against mimesis, I argue that we can foster democratic character traits such as empathy and mutual understanding with illusions, with untruths, with, as Shakespeare writes in *Macbeth*, "lies like truth," the stuff of the stage (Plato 1992; *Mac*. 5.5.43). The beginning of this chapter discusses Habermas's anti-theatricalism in more depth before examining a number of Shakespearean characters who demonstrate how actorly techniques can help foster a better democracy. I survey a spectrum of acting styles, such as "naturalistic" acting (Viola in *Twelfth Night*, and all characters who seek to "pass" while in disguise), "stylized" acting (the players in *Hamlet* whom Hamlet accuses of heavy exaggeration) or what we today might call "bad" acting[17] (Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*), and "presentational" acting (which stems from an actor's decision to play his role self-consciously, placing himself between the audience and his character). To conclude, I argue that acting is sometimes essential to expressing one's self and the perils of not being able to act are exemplified by Cordelia and Coriolanus's plights, respectively.

Although my account of acting theory draws heavily upon actors' perspectives, I seek to blur the line between actor and audience for a more holistic understanding of the

[16] This paradox of acting as a way to be genuine towards others, this "honesty" through "deception," has parallels in Shakespeare's plays where characters must act or pretend to be "dead" in order to "live" (Hero, Juliet, Falstaff). These characters emerge, through paradox, to something more sincere and alive.
[17] Whether acting is good or bad according to a standard is less important than whether a connection is made, an affectively democratic assemblage triggered. Both "good" and "bad" acting can be politically exemplary or instructive. A sign of democracy, as I understand it here, in a Deleuzian sense, is its productivity, its capacity to create new dispositions, expansive atmospheres, unusual values, dynamic assemblages, disorderly participations.

democratic spheres, or combinations, or assemblages produced. The trigger of the assemblage may be an actor, or a prop, but the arc between playwright and actor and character and audience member is fluid, shifting, and creative—just as it is between playwright and actor and character and audience member in Shakespeare's plays within plays.

One final note: Even as these Shakespearean actors exist in aristocratic-run communities that assume the great chain of being, they are both sincere and *affectively* democratic in the way they engage others. Their actions bespeak an equality of style and a sincerity that I promote as central to successful, creative democratic deliberation in this chapter.

Habermas and the theater

Habermas views theater in Shakespeare's time as mimetic. Its association with nobility—Habermas quotes from Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* here: "On the boards the polished man appears in his splendor…just as he does so in the upper classes of society" (Habermas 1989: 14)—hindered the advent of the bourgeois public sphere. Before the bourgeois public sphere emerged, a "lord" was "public" by virtue of "representation" (Habermas 1989: 13). The theater existed for the nobility to reflect back upon itself admiringly and establish its dominion over the populace. Habermas admits that, in Renaissance England, the populace was allowed into the theater, unlike in countries where theaters were part of the court and the royal residence (Germany, e.g.). In England, the lower classes were always "ready for a 'spectacle'," he says (Habermas 1989: 38): Here again we see Habermas describing the theater in terms of the coercive customary practices of the modern, proscenium theater—the silent, unseen, consuming audience

hidden in the dark, immobilized before the action on stage, unable to participate, disciplined to stay quiet and still; this describes modern theater often enough, but hardly comes close to capturing the boisterous, interactive, collective theater of Shakespeare's day—projecting back on the very different theater of the Renaissance the conventions of modern theater. Yes, Habermas admits, the lower classes came to the show, "[b]ut," Habermas cautions, "they were all still part of a different types of publicity in which the 'ranks'…paraded themselves, and the people applauded" (ibid). Theater existed to prop up the princely state, was regressive vis-à-vis Habermas's prized public sphere, was oriented to maintaining the authority of the state. Theater heightened the dominance of church and state.

Habermas notes with dismay that elements of this authoritarian mode of representation have once again reared their head. As he understands it, "publicity" stands opposed to his most valued "public discussion." Today (he is writing in 1989 but has not retracted his argument), "organizations and functionaries display *representation*" (Habermas 1989: 200, emphasis original). He cautions: "Representative publicity of the old type [i.e., as existed in Renaissance England] is not thereby revived; but it still lends certain traits to a refeudalized public sphere of civil society" (ibid). Special interests become the general interest through the mirage of a staged (i.e., faked) "representation." Here is Habermas in illuminating detail:

> The aura of personally represented authority returns as an aspect of publicity; to this extent modern publicity indeed has affinity with feudal publicity. Public relations do not genuinely concern public opinion but opinion in the sense of reputation. The public sphere becomes the court *before* whose public prestige can be displayed—rather than *in* which public critical debate is carried on (Habermas 1989: 200-201, emphasis original).

The public sphere becomes the Renaissance court in which prestige is acted out. The space for public critical debate shrinks. Today we witness a predicament in our ability to engage with each other in rational deliberation essential to the healthy functioning of our democracies. From Habermas's views on theater, we can deduce that theater would be the last place he would look for solutions to expanding (or strengthening the quality of) the public sphere.

Critics charge that Habermas overvalues rationalist discourse at the cost of neglecting the imaginative, creative, and visceral realms. As William Connolly parcels it out from an analysis of early Habermasian models of discourse from 18th century salon conversations: Habermas values "rational argument, true publicity, public opinion, collective consensus, and political action" and meanwhile sidelines "manipulative effectiveness, staging, interest compromise, unstable settlement, behavior, and infectious acclamation" (Connolly 1999: 35). Trapped together on the negative outside of Habermas's elevated public sphere is "staging" alongside more devious forms of manipulation. The authoritative, rational force of argument must not be tainted by crafty theatrics. Behind this position, strengthening and ennobling it, lies the Habermasian notion of truth. In privileging the rational capacities of public sphere individuals, as a pathway to truth, Habermas overlooks the ways theatrical irrationality can serve democratic debate. In his view, rational communication precludes aesthetic expression and non-transparent exchanges of ideas. Although he does not eliminate emotional, non-verbal expression as part of deliberation (Neblo 2003)[18], Habermas clearly elevates verbal discourse and rational discursive capability above more general forms of communication action.

[18] Habermas brushes such expressive dimensions aside in one of his early works (Habermas 1979: 1).

In an early work, he gives what he calls "manifest communication" the prominent place, contrasting it with what he calls "experiential expressions" (Habermas 1972: 166). The latter include "the immediately corporeal reactions of blushing and turning pale, rigidification, nervous glance, relaxation, and even laughing and crying" (ibid). He understands these as a signal for "unstated intentions" to better parse the truth. Experiential expressions, he notes,

> can legitimate and emphasize, deny and disavow, make ironic twists clear, unmask dissimulations or signalize deceptions as such. In connection with words and acts, expression serves as an indication of how seriously something is meant, whether the communicating subject is deceiving itself or others, to what degree it wants to or may identify itself with an actual expression of its own life, and how broad is the spectrum of connotation, concealment, or contrary intentions (Habermas 1972: 167).

Here we have the ultimate anti-theater: experiential expression, as one dimension of the structure of ordinary language, can "unmask dissimulations." Habermas even goes to far as to claim for it the ability to communicate whether someone is "deceiving itself or others"—to know one from the other. Habermas's consensus theory of truth requires that to one's own self, one be true: "betrayal of another is simultaneously betrayal of oneself" (Heinrich quoted in Habermas 1987: 325). The "cooperative quest for truth" requires a fundamental honesty with oneself (Habermas 1987: 347). Here we see Habermas's overriding concern with meaning in statements, their truth content.

But it is interesting that Habermas chooses to credit "blushing and turning pale" and "nervous glances" as tools for parsing truth. Because for actors, such is the miracle of moments on stage. George Bernard Shaw gives a first-hand account of Italian actress Eleonora Duse's ability to blush on cue. Shaw writes, "She began to blush; and in another moment she was conscious of it, and the blush was slowly spreading and deepening until,

after a few vain efforts to avert her face…without seeming to do so, she gave up and hid the blush in her hands. … I could detect no trick in it" (Shaw quoted in Meisner and Longwell 1989: 14). Sometimes acting is the opposite of "tricks" and manipulation. To create an illusion and then at once to hide it behind one's hands is a quintessential example of naturalistic acting. It is what Shakespeare's disguised characters do to get by. Acting is not about talking; it is about truthful behavior engendered by living in the moment, responding honestly to one's surroundings. For Habermas, theatrics did not contribute to the public sphere: It is what came before. It was "the *precondition* of rational-critical debate" (Habermas 1989: 164). Property-owning private people would meet *after* the theater, after a concert or museum, and discuss. As such, the theater is excluded from his model of rational deliberation.

Others have noted that Habermas neglects, as Nicholas Garnham recounts the charge, "the rhetorical and playful aspects of communicative action, which leads to too sharp a distinction between information and entertainment and to a neglect of the link, in for instance Rousseau's notion of public festivals, between citizenship and theatricality" (Garnham 1992: 360). I believe this stems from Habermas's association of theater with "spectacle," the word he uses to describe seventeenth century theater (Habermas 1989: 38). Habermas judges theater to be solely representation and removed from any possibility of dialogic interchange—in contrast to letter-writing (which led to diary-writing, "a letter addressed to the sender" [Habermas 1989: 49]) and "the psychological novel." He praises the latter three for ushering in the bourgeois public sphere. "It is no accident," Habermas writes, "that the eighteenth century became the century of the letter: through letter writing the individual unfolded himself in his subjectivity" (Habermas

1989: 48). Letter-writing cultivated the idea of the private self, created a fundamental alteration in self-conception and consciousness, that would allow for the growth of the public sphere. Habermas similarly praises epistolary novels like Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* and *Clarissa* for the feedback between reality and fiction they offered readers, by developing a dialogue between readers and characters and author. "Richardson wept over the actors in his novels as much as his readers did; author and reader themselves became actors who 'talked heart to heart'" (Habermas 1989: 50). Habermas argues that "the empathetic reader repeated within himself the private relationships displayed before him in literature" (ibid). The literary public sphere was formed when private readers come together to reflect on what they read. This contributes to enlightenment and rational-critical debate, argues Habermas, eventually leading to the political public sphere. But there is no reason why the theater could not serve the exact same function. Why could theatergoers not "themselves became actors who talked heart to heart" with the characters on stage (imaginatively in the moment, or following the performance)? Why could empathetic audience members not "repeat within themselves the private relationships displayed before him" in the theater? Theater also offers actors and those influenced by them the opportunity to "unfold themselves in their subjectivity."

Nancy Fraser has raised a question akin to one of performance. To her, "public spheres are not only arenas for the formation of discursive opinion; in addition, they are arenas for the formation and enactment of society identities" (Fraser 1992: 125). When subjects speak, they do not utter their opinions in a cultural vacuum. Aside from the content of what they say, their style of expression is not neutral. The public sphere is also the place for one to "construct and express one's cultural identity through idiom and

style" (Fraser 1992: 126). Institutions, journals, wherever democratic discourse takes place, can make it easier or harder for some voices to be heard. Hence Fraser posits the existence of a multiplicity of public spheres. This idea bears resemblance to the idea of various assemblages that actors enter into, discussed below. But it also indicates the importance of acting and stylization—what we could call character development—to democratic deliberation. My argument is that acting practices can lend social actors a set of techniques useful to their greater participation in publics.

When Habermas laments that the great majority of the consuming public is uncritical, that their debates are now administered by capitalist forces, that so-called democratic discussion "assumes the form of a consumer item" (Habermas 1989: 164), he notes particularly the decline of a literary public sphere. The reading public that discussed culture critically has been supplanted by mass (uncritical) consumers of culture. He seems to believe that theater can only be unilaterally, passively consumed and adds nothing to rational debate. But I would argue, just as important as the ebb in bourgeois reading publics has been the collapse of a theatrical public sphere in the 20th century, a public space to attend theatrical shows and critically discuss them afterwards. According to drama critic Harold Clurman: "In volume of production and in the ambition of its effort the period between 1920-1930 was the richest in American theatre history" (Clurman 1957: 7).[19] This was the time of early O'Neill, the influence of repertory theater, the demise of the European-influenced operetta and the rise of the American musical. The decade following saw noteworthy developments as well. As a founding

[19] Although he was writing in 1957, this is still true, I believe. In fact today, the only Broadway shows that turn a profit are musicals. John Lahr, writing in 1995, says: "We are in danger of losing our theater culture;" "The golden egg may still be there, but Broadway's goose is more or less cooked" (Lahr 1996: xiii, xiv).

member of The Group Theatre, a group of actors, directors, and playwrights working together from 1931-1940, Clurman helped establish "a new kind of theatre that was truly collaborative and which spoke to the moral and social issues of th[e] time" (Silverberg 1994: 4).[20] Exponentially more than books or letters, the theater takes place in collective spaces and fosters dialogic, critical thinking. It depends on immediate and responsive audiences, social ideologies, feedback from the critics, and the material conditions of local communities. What Tennessee Williams calls "the incontinent blaze of a live theater, a theater meant for seeing and for feeling" (Williams 2009: 71) is something indescribably explosive, leaky, dynamic and contagious. The interplay of live human beings and their problems and joys on stage has an intensely life-like honesty. Especially in Renaissance times when the audience participated unrestrictedly, but even in the 20th century, Williams notes that "the theater, which is called the charlatan of the arts, is paradoxically the one in which the charlatan is most easily detected. … It is all honest that does what it professes to do, and there is too much hot light and too many penetrating eyes cast upon the stage for the willful obscurantist to pull his tricks" (Williams 2009: 40). Although a discussion of the theater's immediacy and public-sphere-like qualities would lie outside the scope of this chapter,[21] I will argue below that the theater teaches audience and actor alike to be more sincere, vulnerable and responsive.

[20] "Perhaps the most significant experiment in the history of American theater," the Group staged plays that spoke to the critical political issues of the time, such as labor-business relations and poverty (notably the plays of Clifford Odets), and it was a trial run for method acting styles and psychological realism (Silverberg 1994: 4). Some members of the group had studied with students of Stanislavsky, whose lessons on acting are known as "The System," or the Method (in popular parlance), and they incorporated his theories into their training techniques as they worked, exploring with his insights and ultimately interpreting and transforming them. Acting styles before The Group Theatre came on the scene were stylized, discussed below.

[21] See Mullaney 2015. Theater is there when we "want to think about how we feel, or feel about what we think, and do so in actual, experiential, and felt spaces as well as virtual or imaginary worlds" (Mullaney 2015: 173). "Many people have found theater useful as a kind of social thought as well as an aesthetic

Sincerity and Rationality

In addition to his anti-theatricalism[22], Habermas is clear in his privileging of sincerity and truth as essential for attaining shared understanding. Habermas posits three basic "validity claims,"[23] which are claims that can be accepted or challenged by interlocutors; "A validity claim is equivalent to the assertion that the conditions for the validity of an utterance are fulfilled" (Habermas 1984: 38). This means that a claim must express *sincerely* one's personal belief(s), must raise a morally or *normatively right* claim, and must make a *truthful* or factually correct claim about the external world—each relating to Habermas's three ways of partitioning reality into the subjective world (sincerity), the social or intersubjective world (normative rightness), and the objective world (truth). All three merge of course in practice, but he designates sincerity as merely "expressive" as opposed to cognitive or interactive (ibid). Each party to dialogue, in order to agree, must recognize the validity claims. In his ideal speech situation, he takes for granted "the participants' orientation toward reaching understanding (that is, the sincere expression of utterances)" and that the truth should be sought; "a proposition is true if it withstands all attempts to refute it under the demanding conditions of rational discourse" (Habermas 1998: 367). It is not only through discourse that one sifts truths from untruths. With sincerity claims, persons might make claims relating to their inner beliefs or

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pleasure, and even, as I have proposed here, as a much-needed if not necessary means to engage unsettling ruptures in the social imaginary and fundamental structures of feeling" (Mullaney 2015: 172-3).

[22] However, it is worth noting some ironies in Habermas's stance on the theater. Steven Mullaney has brilliantly shown Habermas's reliance on theater metaphors in his writing on the public sphere's emergence: "Habermas in fact relied on the dynamics of theatrical performance in much of his thinking about the nature of the public sphere" (Mullaney 2015: 151). Mullaney demonstrates "the degree to which Habermas seems incapable of describing novels and empathetic readers without recourse to the language of the stage" (ibid.: 158). Habermas describes the changes in the 1700s to the subjectivity of private individuals who began to write letters and read novels. For Habermas, Mullaney insightfully points out, "reading becomes a performative process" (ibid.: 164). So perhaps the theater has more to do with the initial formation of the bourgeois public sphere than Habermas's theory will allow.

[23] Not counting comprehensibility, whether one is understood, which is a more fundamental validity claim.

feelings—subjective claims—but deciding on their accuracy falls not to discursive means but rather is only found out by comparison with personal behavior. Although early Habermas was wont to ignore expressivity, it is clear that assessing and "proving" one's sincerity rests upon reading such non-verbal cues.

Habermas's primary concern is "reaching understanding" (ibid) through deliberative democratic practices, and he believes there must be conditions in order to yield a valid norm which can then structure debate so that subjects can reach rational consensus. The only way toward rational agreement is through the valleys and hills of sincerity. So close is the tie binding sincerity to rationality for Habermas, that it seems to be unreasonable—an unforgivable denial of our rationality—to lie while trying to reach consensus. "The violation of claims to truth, correctness, and sincerity affects the whole permeated by the bond of reason" (Habermas 1987: 324). In exchanging knowledge, all must be transparent, all must be in sight. Habermas laments the influence of postmodernism, which he associates with the fact that "society has indeed become so complex that it can hardly still be made transparent from within as the dynamic whole of a structural organization" (Habermas 1992: 140-141). Society "can no longer be grasped through narratives" (Habermas 1992: 141). In this mess the private individual becomes alienated from herself as a communicatively acting subject. We feel we are "delivered over to sheer contingencies" (ibid). The only thing that can save us now is Habermas's concept of "linguistically embodied reason" (Habermas 1992: 142).[24] While I agree with Habermas's insights regarding the decentering and expansion of economic and

[24] Habermas believes in language's potential to be a transparent medium for negotiation and expression. One's intentions as to meaning can be automatically rendered in one's utterance. Language conveys reality; it does not shape it, for Habermas. But speech can misfire—something Habermas does not give adequate attention to. For a discussion of this see Dahlgren 1995: 102.

administrative forces into all sectors of our lives, has society ever been "transparent"? Have "narratives" ever been adequate to the task of grasping society as a whole?[25]

Defending the postmodernists in Habermas's sights, the long line from Nietzsche to Derrida whose legacy ultimately leads to irrationality according to Habermas, is a project very different from my own (and has been done quite comprehensively by others; Rabinow 1984; Connolly 1999; see Braaten 1991 for an overview; cf. Habermas 1994). I fully agree with these arguments, that reason is insufficient to reaching consensus in a multicultural democracy,[26] that Habermas presents us with a desiccated vision of democratic deliberative discourse, that he transcendentalizes reason. I would like to argue for the value, *pace* Habermas, of sincerity over truth, of vulnerability over self-containment, and of the emotive over the rational. I argue for the importance of decoupling sincerity and rationality in Habermas's search for the "rational truth," as if the truth could be reached through rationality. Although one could make grand claims about the theater and truth—for these eloquent claims, see Clurman (1957)—I prefer to link the theater to sincerity.

First a word about performance and dramatization in recent political theory. A brilliant school of thinkers have challenged simplistic notions of rationality and truth, concepts like "the original," or "the essential" through what they refer to as methods of dramatization (Derrida 1998; Butler 1990; Deleuze 1995). Judith Butler's concept of performativity, for example, describes an identity in a state of becoming rather than being, constantly requiring performance (Butler 1990). But as she herself notes in the

[25] Habermas assumes that competing publics, competing narratives of society, necessarily detract from greater democracy. But Fraser has argued for the a multiplicity of publics against Habermasian ideals of a "bourgeois, masculinist conception of the public sphere" (Fraser 1992: 117).
[26] See Dana Villa (2001), who makes the case, via Arendt, for theatricality in the public sphere as a necessary addition or complementary dimension to Habermasian rationality.

preface to *Gender Trouble*, "my theory sometimes waffles between understanding performativity as linguistic and casting it as theatrical" (Butler 1990: xxvi). Of course, her notion of performativity, just as a speech act, has both theatrical and linguistic dimensions, but her notion of theatricality does not so much concern the theater. Her theory is too immersed in an analysis of power, regulatory regimes, and language, which is beyond the scope of my concern.

Dramatization as a method of theory conceived by Gilles Deleuze is a way to stage concepts so as to bring out the trajectories latent within them, to access the constellation of their elements (Deleuze 1997; Deleuze 2004). Deleuze opposes dramatization, becoming, and assemblages to action-oriented perceptions, the Idea as simplicity of essence, and being. Because "dramatization as method is a method of intensification" (Mackenzie and Porter 2011: 490), it makes vivid a scene, a set of indeterminate relations, putting into practice an element of surprise and responsiveness. But for Deleuze, and for William Connolly (2013), this is important for the concepts in a philosophical text. I, by contrast, am concerned with actual theater.

I take for granted that there is no original, that words have ambiguous meanings, that signifiers work disorderedly to topple any coherent attempt at conveying thought. While my argument is indebted to arguments put forward by the thinkers cited above, I focus explicitly on theatrical-performative situations.

Further, sincerity is important for me in a way it is not for other scholars who reclaim theatricality. For example, Arendt thought that performance in the public sphere enables actors to keep the private sphere at a remove. The public sphere is an escape (although a dangerous one). Theatricality allows for a distancing from the drudgery of

labor and work. Arendt appreciated a realm of public appearance separate from the intimate. "Human beings in the true sense of the term can exist only where there is a world," that is, a public sphere of human being exchanging ideas through speech and action (Arendt 2005: 176). Richard Sennett makes a similar argument in describing the theatrum mundi of 18th century Paris and London. Sennett describes the streets of these cities as a place where "a bridge was built between what was believable on the stage and what was believable on the street" (Sennett 1977: 64). Before ideas of the authentic self, public life was a show. He regrets the lost art of playacting, the demise of separate public and private spheres, and writes that:

> In an age [like ours] wherein intimate relations determine what shall be believable, conventions, artifices, and rules appear only to get in the way of revealing oneself to another; they are obstructions to intimate expression. As the imbalance between public and intimate life has grown greater, people have become less expressive. With an emphasis on psychological authenticity, people become inartistic in daily life because *they are unable to tap the fundamental creative strength of the actor*, the ability to play with and invest feeling in external images of self. … In a society with a strong public life, there should be affinities between the domains of stage and street (Sennett 1977: 37, my emphasis).

Sennett captures perfectly the need for expressivity in daily life, in our public interactions with each other on the street, in journals, in other forums for democratic deliberation. The world of the theater was more than metaphor in the 18th century. Rousseau acknowledged as much in his *Letter to M. D'Alembert on the theater* in 1757 (Rousseau 1960). Acting was the way of life in the street. The codes of credibility in daily life resembled those of the stage. Sennett argues that a healthy public sphere depends upon it. But Sennett sets up this false dichotomy between public theatricality and private authenticity or sincerity that the theater, I argue, dissolves.

Habermas and Hamlet

Rationality underpins successful communication, for Habermas. Speech and action, as for Arendt, seem to be the two essentials for agreement. Most important to his validity claims are their essential cognitive dimension. For him, to have good reasons, and to express one's reasons, requires "objective evaluation" (Habermas 1984: 22). Aiding the process of objective evaluation are institutions—scientific ones, legal, artistic. These can scrutinize the truth of statements, the rightness of actions, and the sincerity of expressions. How might the theater function as such an institution?

Hamlet, Danish aristocrat and discriminating theatergoer, aims to make it function in such a way. For Hamlet, playing has purpose. The "purpose of playing," he schools a pack of touring players, "both at the first and now, was and is to hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature, to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure" (*Ham*. 3.2.18-22). Hamlet has the travelling players perform for his uncle Claudius in order, like Habermas, to weed out the truth. Hamlet wants to know if his uncle murdered his father. Hamlet loves theater for the instinctual reaction it provokes; if social life, from his perspective, is false and if subjectivity is "duplicitously performative," then the only possibility for a truth lies in eliciting some index of emotion—a blush from Uncle Claudius, e.g.[27] Theater effects an emotional change in both spectators and performers.

In the end, the truth that Habermas and Hamlet seek is impossible. This is because actors participate in assemblages. What do I mean by assemblages? What I mean includes

27 Paul Kottman (2009: 75) makes this point. I read this truth (from Hamlet's perspective) as similar to what Meisner means when he discusses the "truth of the moment"—how, "In acting, truth can be activated most freely when it is forced to respond to something outside itself" (Silverberg 1994: 151). In discussing truth, I do not mean to conjure up images of the Platonic forms or to imply that emotions express one's "true self" faithfully (what Rei Terada 2003 calls the "expressive hypothesis"). Rather, I mean by this, what lies in the energies exchanged between partners and their environment, a responsiveness to what is happening around you, being available to the moment through a sincere responsiveness.

human togetherness. Habermas does have a sense of the togetherness among subjects, essential to democracy, because for him, argumentation requires reciprocity. One person can destroy the success of the deliberative enterprise, can forestall communicative action: "Any violation of the structures of rational life together, to which all lay claim, affects everyone equally" (Habermas 1987: 324). Habermasian unity is indivisible. He also acknowledges the "tense interconnection of the ideal and the real" manifest in discourse (Habermas 1987: 323). What I highlight is the interconnection of the real and the false. An assemblage, for Deleuze and Guattari (2000), goes beyond the individuality of a human being. Assemblages involve not only bodies but the comportments of those bodies, what those bodies say, along with the elements with which those bodies combine. Combining sounds, gestures, lighting, and more, assemblages are made up of "speeds and affects," as elements within the assemblage are rearranged or new elements are formed or subtracted, new unities forged into alliance. Deleuze and Guattari define an assemblage as an "increase in the dimensions of a multiplicity that necessarily changes in nature as it expands its connections" (Deleuze and Guattari 2000: 9). Actors on stage are always expanding their connections with things and people around them, making scenes, changing identities, picking up props, adopting moods and dispositions to fit the environment. An assemblage can just as easily include the group of people in the audience.

I am arguing that actors make assemblages and it is not important whether those are assemblages of truth or fiction. Indeed, the assemblages actors participate in highlight the irrelevance of, the interconnections between, truth and falsity. It makes no sense to speak of assemblages as true or false. In the theater, one character's truth is another

character's fantasy; one director's insight is another director's enigma, one act's figurative is a second act's literal. Actors put things together, make assemblages in new ways so as to create new worlds: Not one of these worlds is fully false or fully true. True and false is a knot impossible to undo.

Different Styles of Acting, Different Styles of Democratic Discourse: Naturalistic

Habermas believes that when a subject speaks, they should, as Hamlet puts it, hold a mirror up to nature. The "cooperative quest for truth" involves objective, "cognitive" statements about reality. This would be "naturalistic" acting—the type of acting where, if one is given the cue to cry, one concentrates on holding back the tears and not crying, for this will make it look more real. This is about an actor's identification with a character, honestly arrived at: *I am the character*, not a style but a person, and I embody her completely. The greatest example of this type of acting are the disguised characters in Shakespeare. These actors do not tread the boards; they are not trained actors. They are not saddled with the burdens imposed by a formal play, the constraints of script, the fright inspired by an audience, having to interact with a cast. Viola in *Twelfth Night* even denies being an actor (*Twelfth Night* 1.5.163),[28] and yet she gives what has to be a perfect performance.[29] Everyone thinks she is a man; no one ever doubts the truth of her disguise, and she only ever comes close to breaking character when faced with the immediate prospect of fighting a duel. While she has no script to constrain her, her always-"improvised" lines must be uttered from the mouth and character of the

[28] References to *Twelfth Night* are hereafter abbreviated as *TN*.

[29] Naturalistic acting, often manifest as disguise, is a tool of survival in Shakespeare's plays: vulnerable characters (Viola, Rosalind in *As You Like It*, Innogen in *Cymbeline*, and Edgar and Kent in *King Lear*) often need disguise to survive on dangerous terrain. Consider too that Edgar and Kent in *King Lear* are the only two in this tragedy to formally disguise themselves, and, perhaps consequently, are the only two main characters left standing at the play's close. These characters are forced to act another's part in order to escape some form of impending danger (either banishment by a jealous or arrogant king or duke; or the lack of safety in travelling alone).

fictional male part she plays. More than this, she comes across as genuine; for consider the way the Duke confides in her after only three days of acquaintance: "I have unclasped to thee the book even of my secret soul" (*TN* 1.4.12-13). To become so familiar with the Duke so quickly, she must seem open and sincere—for such innocent guilelessness is often what provokes confidential disclosures from others. Viola values reciprocity and gratitude more than truthfulness. In one telling moment, Viola says, "I hate ingratitude more in a man / Than lying, vainness, babbling drunkenness…" (*TN* 3.4.318-9). Reciprocity to the kindnesses of others holds a higher place in her esteem than—importantly—not lying. Perhaps there is a greater value to gratitude, and being open to the other. These are habits of being, I will argue, that Viola's art of acting nurtures.[30]

Not only is Viola receptive to others around her, showing a responsiveness, an *ethos* of receptivity, sustained in a way unparalleled among characters in this play. Prerequisite to this receptivity is a genuine interest in others, a curiosity and ability to listen and see them, both as they present themselves to others and as others take them. Stephen Greenblatt notes Viola's "improvisational boldness" (Shakespeare 2008: 1790). We see numerous instances of her responding to others, taking them up on their own terms rather than hers. In her first embassage to Olivia's house, we hear Malvolio say of her before she is received, "he takes on him to understand so much," which hints both at Viola's acting ability and her perceptive skills (*TN* 1.5.124-5; also *TN* 3.1.112). Viola then tells Olivia to treat her kindly, for she is sensitive to and effected by the discourtesy of others easily (*TN* 1.5.156). Then, when Olivia chastises her for "beginning rudely,"

[30] Of course, part of Viola's ability to win the Duke's confidence stems from her sincerity and the part of herself she retains in the role. While experimenting with new ways of being, one must keep an orienting sensibility. Actors like Viola give style to themselves, fitting the various elements of their nature into an artistic plan.

Viola bandies back: "The rudeness that hath appeared in me have I learned from my entertainment [reception]" (*TN* 1.5.188-9). A few lines later, when Olivia deploys a Biblical metaphor, Viola proceeds "[t]o answer by the method" (*TN* 1.5.200) and keep to the same imagery.[31]

During her next visit to Olivia's, Viola shows the same ability to react sensitively to others, and then to cast herself on their wavelength: When Sir Andrew speaks to her in French, she responds in kind (*TN* 3.1.65). And in her solitary reflections on the fool Feste, what she recounts can be similarly valuable when applied to the actor's trade (and, I believe, can be applied to her own way of being in the world): "He must observe their mood on whom he jests,/The quality of persons, and the time,/And, like the haggard, check at every feather/That comes before his eye ["As a wild hawk must be sensitive to its prey's disposition"]. This is a practice [skill]…" (*TN* 3.1.55-59). Naturalistic actors, like Feste described here, must be sensitive to "every feather," must observe every look and hints of turns in their audiences' moods and frames of mind.[32] This requires a basic openness to the other, an openness that allows for creation, for untimely ideas and practices.

This openness is a quality that Sanford Meisner's technique for actors attempts to nurture. I now make a brief foray into the work of Meisner (another founding member of The Group Theatre) whose methods help develop a level of responsiveness to the outside

[31] Compare Le Beau in *As You Like It*, who answer's Celia's "Sport! of what color?" with a confused "What color, madam! how shall I answer you?" (*AYL* 1.2.83). Like actors in repetition games (described below), Viola can "answer by the method," i.e., go with the flow—unlike Le Beau.

[32] Incidentally, Shakespeare's disguised characters and his fools and court jesters are close cousins to what Connolly describes as "seers." Seers dwell in fecund moments of time: They "allow multiple pressures and concerns to reverberate through" them during these moments, hoping that "a new, untimely idea, theme, or strategy will emerge for further exploration" (Connolly 2013: 134).

world (Meisner and Longwell 1987; Silverberg 1994). Meisner offers actors techniques that share similarities with what William Connolly calls role experimentation.[33]

Meisner's techniques tread a careful line between channeling one's unconscious, instinctual or visceral perceptions (techniques of self) and giving way to a perception of the other that bypasses the self (techniques of self loss). Before their intervention, acting styles hewed to imitation approaches. One declaimed lines formalistically. As one actor recalls: "you [gave] your solo performance no matter what any of the other actors did" (Stern quoted in Silverberg 1994: 152). This annoying lack of attention produces one-note creations unresponsive to the surrounding environment. Konstantin Stanislavsky's methods gave Group actors something different, something akin to an artistic plan, which they further developed to suit their own experiences.

For Stanislavsky, feeling is beyond conscious control and must be accessed through response and intuition (Meisner and Longwell 1989). His "System" involves a set of conscious techniques intended to awaken our unconscious intuitions and gut reactions. There is always an unpredictable element to the emotion, even if we aim to stimulate it with some degree of precision. Hamlet's soliloquy where he laments the impotence of "the motive and the cue for passion" that he possesses (*Ham*. 2.2.538) registers the tension between passion, the volitional character of emotion, and the "cue," which seems formal and automatic and predictable. Paul Kottman recognizes Socrates' encounter with Ion when the former asks, "When you sing a pitiful episode...are you at that time in your right mind, or do you get beside yourself?" as a precedent for Hamlet's

[33] For Connolly, role experimentation holds potential for a progressive politics. One works experimentally on the self to help redefine that self in its relation to the dominant powers. "If role performances become frozen, so do our beliefs, identities, and larger modes of political experiment" (Connolly 2013: 193).

lament (Kottman 2009). Getting "beside oneself" and self-forgetting are states that Meisner's techniques aim to elicit in actors (or in audience members like Claudius).

It may seem that the prefiguration of a script undermines the notion of responsiveness in a given performance. Does having a fixed text allow for creativity? Acting as becoming democratic, or becoming responsive, captures the sense of something that is both scripted in advance and yet enacted and rescripted by historically situated agents. Acting is the creation of the same words anew night after night: a surprising combination of rote and impulse. The noted Shakespearean director Peter Brook conceives of a process that both the author and the actor engage to reach the words:

> A word does not start as a word—it is an end product which begins as an impulse, stimulated by attitude and behavior which dictate the need for expression. This process occurs inside the dramatist; *it is repeated inside the actor*. …both for the author and then for the actor the word is a small visible portion of a gigantic unseen formation. … *the only way to find the true path to the speaking of a word is through a process that parallels the original creative one* (Brook 1968: 12,13, my emphasis).

This accounts for Shakespeare's lack of stage directions: he wanted to let the creative process work inside the actor. Brook says, "the best dramatists explain themselves the least" (Brook 1968: 13). Parts are not built by actors; they are born. Built parts eventually erode. Parts that are born must be continually reborn, recreated each night—and hence, different (Brook 1968: 115). This takes effort on the part of the actor. Brook even goes so far as to call acting "mediumistic"—because the actor is responsive to the "tremors" within him, the "flickers" and "tiny inner movements," that "mysterious inner chamber" of impulse that signals the creation of character (Brook 1968: 109, 111).

Meisner's methods include practicing what are known as "repetition exercises." Two actors sit across from each other. One begins by saying the very first thing she

notices about the other. The other partner repeats the observation. They continue in this fashion. "If we can once pay attention to what sits across from us, we free our natures to come up with reactions we could never plan" (Silverberg 1994: 151). The response to each partner must be immediate. The actor is simply a vessel for the raw emotion of his response.[34] The exercise aims to develop the ability to respond to the other through instinct, and, in turn, to discern the other's response. The actors must channel all their attention into the moment, what is happening now between them, all the while, in Viola's words, "observ[ing] their mood…the quality of perso[n]," etc. Meisner teaches:

> More of our acting comes from true listening[35] (another way of saying that is *being fully available*) than from anything else. Our fuel on stage is our partners, the other actors [or props, setting, etc], so that we must be open and receptive to them at all times. Even in the midst of the most extreme and heightened moments, it is imperative that we be present to our partners and our environment in every moment (the stage is a dangerous place!) (Silverberg 1994: 9, emphasis original).

The danger lies in the unknown aspects of the creative, the responsive. The ultimate point is to get out of one's head, to short-circuit one's *conscious* reaction with an instinctual one (since "being in your head is the death of your acting" [Meisner quoted in Meisner and Longwell 1989: 15]). Self-consciousness, intense looking-inward, inhibits emotional commitments to others. Acting combines creation and discovery, and these exercises hone an imaginative responsiveness to the outside world.

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[34] The idea of a personal feeling is different from the becomings described in the previous section. Deleuze describes affect outside of conscious awareness. He differentiates feeling (Meisner's focus), emotion (social), and affect (abstract, a "prepersonal intensity" that concerns the body's ability to act). For Deleuze, affect gives feeling intensity and is dissociated from the will whereas Meisner is interested in the spontaneous will prompted by one's feeling.

35 That Shakespeare knew the importance of listening and receptivity skills in actors can be seen by considering the final scene in *Cymbeline*, which simply is not effective without them. Granville-Barker (1963) notes: "For the scene to be effective one rule must be observed in its acting; it is a fundamental rule in all acting, strangely liable to neglect. Each actor must resolutely sustain his part through his long intervals of listening. The action is kept alive by a series of surprises…" (106).

Being open “to the impulsive shifts in your instinctual behavior caused by what [is] being done to you by your partner” (Meisner and Longwell 1989: 107) requires being vulnerable to surprise and contingency. The vulnerable listen. This vulnerability may even entail passivity but, as Sara Ahmed writes, "passivity can be an ethical capacity: you have to be willing to be affected by others, to receive their influence" (Ahmed 2010: 221). This sustained listening and willingness to be affected by others primes us for surprise elements in our encounters and supports interaction with others in a more *genuinely democratic or responsive* way. These exercises seek to combine both receptivity (a listening to others) and instinct (a listening to the self) in the actor. Instinct alone is no good. Mistress Quickly, the nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*, and the Bawd in *Pericles* possess instinct in abundance but lack a receptiveness. Balance is key.

Being open to the world in the way that naturalistic acting requires would mean to practice relating honestly to the world, to practice a heightened responsiveness to what is happening around you, being available to the moment, being attuned to the energies exchanged between us and the environment. Eleonora Duse said that “One must forget oneself” when acting (Duse quoted in Silverberg 1994: 151). This is the ultimate state of unknowing. There is always a death, a lack of vitality, that lies in the certainty of knowledge. This can sap the artist’s creativity. Instead one channels one’s child-like intuition before the onset of the profound self-consciousness that usually characterizes adulthood. Acting calls for a transcendence of self in order to engage the other (e.g., a fellow cast member). Self-doubt or insecurities, which stem from a self-focused looking-inward, might prevent us from following through on emotional commitments to others that we would otherwise seek to secure—which is important for successful democratic

dialogue. This is the only way the actor can works off her partner to create something outside herself—or the only way democratic actors can create public spheres outside themselves.

The difference between the life of the stage and of the real is one of degree, not kind. Engaging in honest debate might take place with subjects "disguised" in one way or another but this need not undermine their sincerity.

But there is something more to say about the obstacles to naturalistic acting. In *Hamlet*, when the First Player delivers a monologue about Pyrrhus's ancient murder of Priam, this sets what Richard Halpern has called "a heroic yardstick with which" Hamlet can "measure his own reduced condition" (Halpern 2008: 475). Here Hamlet's "mirror" prompts him—moments after seeing the First Player's performance—to berate himself into acting. His line here regarding his own "cue for passion" (*Ham*. 2.2.538), lamenting the impasse in his inability to feel passion even post-"cue," registers a failed attempt to feel. Although it may not always be helpful to democratic discourse, when it is possible to act one's passions, or to make the attempt, it just might lead to a deepened effort at dialogue and exchange. Otherwise, one can choose other acting styles.

Stylized Acting

Stylizing acting is often contrasted with naturalistic acting.[36] For naturalistic actors, acting is not about a conscious attempt at imitation but rather an instinctual

[36] In case one is wondering about acting styles during Shakespeare's day: Knowledge of acting styles in Elizabethan times is made more difficult by the theater closure between 1642 and 1660. When plays started being performed again, most performers were of a different generation. If acting styles can change so dramatically in the last 100 years, when technology makes continuity easier—to the point where an individual actor like John Gielgud would look back on his Hamlet and critique his performance as too sing-songy (Elsom 1981)—imagine how hard continuity was back then. We have no definitive knowledge on whether acting styles were naturalistic or formalistic, although most critics believe the latter to be true, despite evidence for both styles (see critics cited by Wells 1997). Theater companies used "sides" and the only person who had a full copy of the prompt script was the stage manager because they could not afford a

responsiveness to the other. Sincerity is paramount. But stylizing acting is more akin to what we see on the stage or in silent film. Meaning is conveyed in more conspicuous fashion: large gestures, exaggerated movements, overdramatic posing. It is imitation, not the birth and creation that Brook describes. Steward Stern describes the affected, stilted results of his pursuit of this old-style art of acting: "I was careful to employ my Maurice Evans vibrato for anything Shakespearean, my Eva Le Gallienne voice—with its haunted vowels and rapier consonants—for anything from Chekhov up, and my general-service-Robert-Frost-rural-poet voice for everything American" (Stern in Silverberg 1994: 153).

Stylizing acting is to naturalistic acting what impressionist painting is to photography. Or, as Elia Kazan sums up the difference: "Stylized acting and direction is to realistic acting as poetry is to prose" (Kazan quoted in Murphy 1992: 26). If prose presents us with a more transparent picture of everyday life, poetry wraps life in ornate metaphors and symbolic meanings. Because this form of expression does not seem as sincere and honest, as heartfelt and intuitive, as naturalistic acting, we might be tempted to dismiss it as irrelevant to democratic deliberation. But the pomp and fuss of overacting has something to offer deliberative democrats too.

Consider some stylized actors from Shakespeare. Hamlet hates stylized acting, heavy exaggeration, protesting too much. Hamlet tells the touring players: "O, it offends me to the soul to hear a robustious, periwig-pated fellow tear a passion to tatters, to very rags, to split the ears of the groundings…." (*Ham*. 3.2.7-9). Such overripe distortions not only crack the theatrical "mirror" but they can gum up the smooth procession of the play. Bottom, the actor who magically turns into an ass and becomes the object of extended

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printer, so they wrote out each person's part. I am inclined to agree with Stanley Wells' surmise that, "styles of acting may have varied from one performer to another, and may have altered over the years, in part to suit the style in which plays were written" (Wells 1997: 5).

ridicule by a group of aristocratic highbrows in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, embodies the cautionary tale described by Hamlet. Bottom, unlike Hamlet, loves to split the ears of the standing audience: "my chief humor is for a tyrant. I could play [H]'erc'les rarely, or a part to tear a cat in, to make all split" (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* 1.2.22-23).[37] We might judge this as "bad" acting, but its unusual conviction, verve, and originality cannot be denied: "You have not a man in all Athens able to discharge [perform] Pyramus but he" (*MND* 4.2.7-8), his fellow actor says. Discharge indeed—like a cannonball.

Poetry can be conceived of as something more than the prosaic, more connected to other images, to other worlds. Recall Deleuze and Guattari's definition of an assemblage as an "increase in the dimensions of a multiplicity that necessarily changes in nature as it expands its connections." Expanding connections can also describe theatrical becomings, taking on new characters, new modes of expression. An actor expands his connections, but never with complete control. Tracing the genesis of a scene or assemblage created between actors allows us to note the teleodynamic processes at work in its formation, a panoramic as opposed to strictly linear idea of time. There is no strict cause and effect at work. Additionally, experience is not what a subject undergoes but, for actors, it is a journey from self to self, experimental strivings. A genuine transformation happens through such passages. For Deleuze and Guattari, "becoming" refers to transformative connection between actors, actions, and effects; against the stability of "being," it acknowledges the shifting, precarious and circumstantial nature of experience and relationships (Deleuze and Guattari 2000). If Hamlet says he sees a play to behold actors offering nature a "mirror," Deleuze and Guattari allow us to view

[37] References to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are hereafter abbreviated as *MND*.

Hamlet's perspective as misguided. For Deleuze, theatrical dramatization is never a stable repetition of the image (and cannot be used to inculcate morality via pure transmission); dramatization is always about becoming rather than being. Becoming is a process "not content to proceed by resemblance" (Deleuze and Guattari 2000: 233), imitation, A = A. Theatrical magic lies in the ability to inaugurate a series of becomings on "a creative vanishing line" as spectators behold "minor transformations in relation to dominant forms and subjects" (Deleuze and Guattari 2000: 251-252). Charged along lines of flight that shoot through stable subjects like electrified rails, disruptive becomings can upend one's habitual ways of being by awakening us to an outside world of non-human interactions.

This is what Bottom's acting does. We might describe Bottom the way Carson McCullers describes the hunchback in *Ballad of the Sad Cafe*:

> There is a type of person who has a quality about him that sets him apart from other and more ordinary human beings. Such a person has an instinct which is usually found only in small children, an instinct to establish immediate and vital contact between himself and all things in the world. Certainly the hunchback was of this type. … This could account for the air of freedom and illicit gladness (McCullers 2005: 20).

Bottom has this instinct to establish contact with the world, to form assemblages. Bottom demonstrates an overwhelming enthusiasm for any and all roles in *The Most Lamentable Comedy and Most Cruel Death of Pyramus and Thisby*—including Heracles, a lion, a moon, a woman, and the chink of a wall. If Hannah Arendt values theater for being "the only art whose sole subject is man in his relationship to others" (Arendt 1998: 188), *Pyramus and Thisby* of Bottom's friends extends that subject explicitly to man in his relationship to non-human actors. Here is a truly pluralistic *ethos*. The wall that divides the lovers, the lion that scares Thisbe, and lantern who sheds much-needed light: These

figures shore up the main throughline of the show. Further, Bottom's hijinks, his multiple "becomings," can help elaborate possibilities for a contemporary *ethos* of democracy.

In Bottom's friends' assortment of roles, we witness non-human objects, nature, and humans intertwined in a dynamic display of creative agency. As Jane Bennett puts it, "insofar as anything 'acts' at all, it had already entered an agentic assemblage" (Bennett 2010: 121). Each act is a conjoint endeavor between humans and the objects and events in the spaces they occupy. Humans take on new distinctions as they participate and respond creatively to their spaces.

The theater is not life reduced or in miniature, to Bottom. It is life overdramatized, exaggerated, infinitely fresh and fun. Bottom lives in a space of passion,[38] visceral and transformative, of pasteboard and dazzle. He displays his enthusiasm at its most becoming angles. If Hamlet craves resemblance, strict fidelity to his mode of "real life," the standard model, the Platonic idea, becomings offer something different: an uncharted journey. Deleuze and Guattari oppose resemblances to journeys along a "vanishing line" (Deleuze and Guattari 2000: 235), lines of flight away from a stable subject—like a walk over the narrow wire of a tightrope dancer suspended over an abyss. Bottom undertakes these journeys.[39] As Rene Girard describes it: Bottom "enters into all conceivable and inconceivable roles with such passion that he is losing sight of

[38] "Aside from the genius of their verse, what has mattered most to audiences and readers over the centuries, what has moved them most profoundly, and what they have most remembered, are the plays' representation of states of emotion, 'the passions' as they were called in the Renaissance: (Kirsch 26).

[39] Taking inspiration from a paradoxical line from Gilles Deleuze's "One Less Manifesto"—Deleuze's most direct engagement with the theater, I like to think of Bottom as a genius. In this essay, Deleuze quotes the director Carmelo Bene approvingly, expanding on his sentiments: "truly great authors are the minor ones, the untimely ones" (Deleuze 1997: 242). The greatness of the minor lies, for Deleuze, in the minor's ability to initiate what he calls "becomings." The initiators of becomings, Deleuze calls "geniuses": "The genius is someone who knows how to make everybody/the whole world a becoming" (Deleuze and Guattari 2000: 200)—notably because of his or her heightened perceptive ability: "think of it as an affair of perception" (194; F. Scott Fitzgerald is an example they give). The genius is not a stable subject, but rather a position: "Sometimes each and every animal…occupies this dynamic position" (Deleuze and Guattari 2000: 17).

his own personality" (Girard 1987: 101); Bottom exemplifies the loss of self-identity that follows in the wake of mimetic contagion. Girard reads acting as mimesis: "Those who desire mimetically are really trying to exchange their own despised being against the glorious being of their victorious model" (Girard 1987: 113). But even stylized acting is not *solely* about imitating someone else. I also resist the stability implied by an immutable "someone else." What happens to "selves" is not necessarily the most important element in an acting assemblage.

Bottom's madcap journeys signal a theater that celebrates a logic of infinite variation rather than the solid, privileged realm of fidelity and representation. *Pyramus and Thisby* holds promise for what Deleuze calls "a revolutionary theater, a simple loving potentiality, an element for a new becoming of consciousness" (Deleuze 1997: 256). There are no standards here, no authorial representations affirmed by an actor's authority or the hierarchical political structure of codified power. Bottom is an aspiring tragedian, but when his audience flings laughs at him, no matter: He does not consider his work to have failed. The attempt at a sort of realism is there—within safe parameters: Bottom wonders how to personify moonshine, or how loudly that lion should roar so as not to upset the audience. By not conforming to stringent standards of realism, by patently, purposefully puncturing the illusion of faithful imitation ("know that I as Snug the jointer am / A lion" [*MND* 5.1.218-9]), the amateurs enter into a state of becoming.

If we conceive of acting in terms of becomings, a provocation to pursue the shifting nexus of reflection and refraction rather than the closed circuit of real self = fake self, this opens up a much less human-centered view of the craft. We can also begin to see, in the distance, new figurations of togetherness. Actorly assemblages are more

attuned to the instabilities and vacancies of identity, the different registers of spacio-temporality, the becomings blooming, buzzing, and busting in the human, non-human, supra-human, and extra-human worlds. Becoming also gives equal weight to the actors, the roles, the audience, and their interactions, the fleeting in-between-ness of objects, selves, and environment. "Becoming produces nothing other than itself. We fall into a false alternative if we say that you either imitate or you are. *What is real is the becoming itself*, the block of becoming, not the supposedly fixed terms through which that which becomes passes" (Deleuze and Guattari 2000: 238, emphasis mine). Becomings transpire on the fuzzy end of the existential lollipop, with protean moods and unfocused energies that exceed the parameters of established identity categories.

When Bottom begs to be the lion (and when he unwittingly plays the ass in real life), he strives to unhinge his dogmatic attachment to being Bottom, playfully rearranging the pregiven elements of his identity. Deleuze and Guattari conceive of these efforts as "becomings-animal," which trace a logic of creative variation. They describe an episode of becoming-animal where Vladimir Slepian covers his hands with shoes to establish "a new relation" (Deleuze and Guattari 2000: 258). Slepian's hands "become" paws in an "unnatural participation" (Deleuze and Guattari 2000: 260). Like acting, all becomings allow us to become more flexible in who we are, but becoming-animal is a childhood game that induces a sense of magic in its practitioners: "all children…do it to a greater or lesser degree…" (Deleuze and Guattari 2000, 274). Bottom, to a greater degree, as evinced in his attempt to grab all the limelight ("Let me play the lion too; I will roar, that I will do any man's heart good to hear me; I will roar, that I will make the duke say, 'Let him roar again, let him roar again'" [*MND* 1.2.58-60]). Everyone in Bottom's

troupe shares this sense of wonder, this enchantment with make-believe. The opening lines of the prologue run, "Gentles, perchance you wonder at this [dumb] show; / But wonder on…" (*MND* 5.1.126-7). Theater is magic for them, an occasion for wonderment and playful disorder in the interim before "Truth makes all things plain" and quashes the fun.

Stylized Acting Up Against Anti-Democratic Judgment

Bottom and his troupe are appropriated by their aristocratic betters, who adhere to Hamlet's artistic standards. Like the professional traveling players in *Hamlet*, Bottom and his troupe are likened to animals. They exist below the threshold of recognized human identity (Bottom literally becomes an ass), underscoring an association with the herd or the commonplace. As Louis Adrian Montrose notes, Bottom and his friends cut a child-like relationship to their social betters (Montrose 1983: 85). What's worse, their reputations precede them, as when Egeus recommends against their play to the Duke, saying "it is nothing" (*MND* 5.1.78). There is a background of beliefs and assumptions from which the aristocrats judge.

For one, the aristocratic perspective on *Pyramus and Thisbe* seems unduly circumscribed.[40] Duke Theseus sees jangly chaos, "a tangled chain," "all disordered": he asks: "How shall we find the concord of this discord?" (*MND* 5.1.124, 125, 60). The aristocrats value concord, A = A, fidelity to "real life" as they see it. Even the title ("A tedious brief scene of young Pyramus and his love Thisbe: very tragical mirth"), the Duke finds "wondrous strange" because of its contradictions (*MND* 5.1.56-7, 59). But the strange becomings of the show portend a different style of engagement, more open, more

[40] Annabel Patterson describes this perspective as having "only one possible view of Bottom and his colleagues—the social condescension that laughs at, not with, their amateur theatricals" (Patterson 1998: 167).

fluid, more democratic, less aristocratic. Michelle M. Dowd argues for Bottom's "ability to disrupt and reimagine the forms of social differentiation" (Dowd 2013: 155). As opposed to the playful energies of becoming and identity-interchange that acting facilitates, which elude judgment and sometimes stable meaning, the aristocrats view themselves, or the highest in rank among them, as the ultimate arbiter of meaning. Further, there is an impatience and almost spiteful need to critique the working class players. What begins as a bald remark about Quince's prologue by the Duke ("His speech was like a tangled chain—nothing impaired, but all disordered" [*MND* 5.1.124-5]) percolates into distracting banter.

Some productions of *Midsummer* minimalize this rude and distracting aristocratic judgment and end with the artistic triumph of the players, as does Michael Hoffman's 1999 movie version. Although the performance quality spans a range (it is Flute, not Bottom, who steals the show), the players have their audience in tears at the end. This contrasts with Max Rheinhardt's 1935 film that plays the scene for laughs, capitalizing on James Cagney's portrayal of Bottom. Cagney, with his strong, lower-East-side accent, was known for his roles in gangster films. One critic said he blended "innocent weaver, Chicago hood, and ugly duckling" (quoted in Jorgens 1997: 39). Bottom is a lovable idiot in Cagney's hands. The question of where the audience's sympathy is expected to lie—with the players or with the aristocrats?—can perhaps only be decided in reference to a specific performance, and productions of the play take various stances on the question. Certainly failed art is not the sole property of the lower class in Shakespeare's plays (consider Hamlet's confession to Ophelia that he takes sick at his own bad verse: "O dear

Ophelia, I am ill at these numbers. I have not art to reckon my groans [express my feelings]..." [*Ham*. 2.2.120-1]).

Leaving aside the question of the aesthetic merit of *Pyramus and Thisbe*, or of production values, and no matter the craftsmen's malapropisms[41] (besides—they correct each other, as a community of equals ought do), the fact remains that they are misunderstood and undervalued. The aristocrats fail to enter into the magical context so arduously created for their benefit—and the aristocrats are similarly rude, judgmental and snobby in *Hamlet* at performance time. No wonder Hamlet feels comfortable sacrificing the players to pursue his own agenda—like fatted calves set alight by a realist paganism ("hold…the mirror up to nature"). The players and the audience live in incommensurable worlds. The players say Bottom can act; the audience disagrees. The players say Bottom is well-fitted to perform Pyramus; Egeus says not one player is appropriately cast. Whose word do we take? An interpretive dilemma arises as criteria for judgment dissolve.

Transhistorical standards are inappropriate and judgement is suspended in the midst of becomings. Disturbances, which acting practices inaugurate, in culturally coded identity categories call for a different appraisal of time and events. For example, when Cagney was cast as Bottom, a new assemblage was formed based partly on how the actor had been typecast previously: gangster-Bottom. Here Bottom is foolish but not so innocent. A 1939 interracial production called *Swingin' the Dream* showcased Louis Armstrong as Bottom, editing the dialogue to legitimate the mechanicals' skillful performance and setting Shakespearean verse to jazz music (*Swingin' the Dream* 1939).

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[41] Aristotle's (and MacIntyre's) virtue (discussed in the introduction) requires practical intelligence, *phronesis*. Gauging intelligence presupposes a dominant standard, whereas my equalizing virtues do not require human intelligence. MacIntyre and I also differ regarding judgment; he writes: "judgment has an indispensible role in the life of the virtuous man" (MacIntyre 1981: 154). I argue against dominant standards of judgment.

Substituting a "stage audience" for the aristocratic court, and thereby cutting out the mockery of the upper classes, the mechanicals engage in a call and response with this audience. Thisbe asks, "where is my love?" and the audience sings back various tunes including "Way Down Yonder in New Orleans." The audience is temporally transported to the American South, dwelling more vividly in the reverberations between Shakespearean verse and Dixieland jazz. The effect of temporal disjunction, shuttling between past and present temporalities, throws a wrench in attempts at judgement. There is no way to know in advance an "appropriate" response to a becoming or an event. A becoming may be untimely or anachronistic vis-à-vis its setting. Just as some events cannot be explained in terms of their contemporary context, or in light of some grand arc of history, or within a coherent narrative, so too some identity categories cannot be made sense of set against the contemporary background assumptions circulating in their day. These radical breaks defy human causality schemes.

There are two levels of experience in the staging of *Midsummer* I wish to flag here. At the level of the text, the aristocrats critique the rude mechanicals, viewing them through the lens of traditional standards. The aristocrats' rigidity surfaces humorously in the Duke's demand for a level of literalness that the players are not in a position to offer: the Duke says, "the man should be put into the lantern. How is it else the man i' th' moon?" (*MND* 5.1.237-39). The players' playful designs do not register for their audience. Bottom and his friends offer an imaginative experience that hinges on a profound theatrical elasticity, forms of becoming, whereas by contrast, the aristocrats seek only what they know: they want the man *in* the moon. But at the level of performance, the actors are responsive agents who create a scene together and in doing

so, counter the dominant discourse of the aristocrats. The very co-creation of their scene demonstrates this alternative dimension to the dominant textual one—a democratic dimension immanent to their playful responsiveness, the influence they exercise on each other, their dependence and vulnerability to each other. By pitting text against performance, we can determine where democracy happens on stage and how it takes shape within the experience of seeing actors interact.

The aristocrats fail to enter or even entertain the democratic assemblage on stage before them. The Duke sketches a sort of imaginative graciousness when he says of the working-class players: "It we imagine no worse of them than they of themselves, they may pass for excellent men" (*MND* 5.1.211-12). But they fail to extend the shade of disbelief over their portrayals. The intensity of their repartee as they poke fun at the play's plot and performers takes the measure of their snobbery. Derek Attridge's description of context throws into relief the aristocrats' failures:

> [A] reader can go some way toward achieving an openness to whatever the work may offer. This involves an effort to clear the mind of preconceptions, thus to some degree resisting the pressure of context, and, somewhat paradoxically, a willingness to be surprised, and a willingness to treat surprise as a reason for fresh engagement rather than for a mental closing down (Attridge 2011: 688).

Spectators share a limited capacity for surprise similar to the capacity that Meinser's repetition exercises hone and that precipitates an actor's becoming. It takes sufficient imagination to be fooled into belief. Although the Duke sees his viewing of the play as a favor—"The kinder we, to give them thanks for nothing. / Our sport shall be to take what they mistake, / And what poor duty cannot do, / Noble respect [consideration] takes it in might, not merit" (*MND* 5.1.89-92)—there is no *readiness to be changed* that comes with open-minded spectatorship. The Duke sees here an opportunity to show benevolence—

"the kinder we"—but his penchant for "sport" with the workers' "mistakes" rivals his initial generous impulse. Perhaps this is just proof that democracies, not dukedoms, offer the most fertile ground for actorly responsiveness.

The Duke's judgement forecloses his entry into an assemblage with the moment because he will not let surprise[42] take him off guard. But his judgment of the play as "bad" illustrates the context-boundedness of such reviews. To follow Attridge again: "the question of what 'good' writing is, as a slight acquaintance with literary history shows, very much a matter of context" (Attridge 2011: 694). Indeed, Thisbe says of his love Pyramus, "His eyes were green as leeks" (*MND* 5.1.322), which may not rate as Petrarchan sonnet material. But similar analogies abound in the King James Bible and are judged as worship-worthy High Art: e.g., "thy belly is like a heap of wheat" (*Song of Solomon*, 7:2). The aristocrats—and the majority of critics—should not be so quick, then, to see *Pyramus and Thisbe* as failed art.[43]

A more democratic responsiveness involves suspending judgment, pursuing surprise, Duse's self-forgetting. In new contexts, one must drop one's previous attachments to enter into new assemblages. Acting techniques offer a system, some preliminary guide rails along the dangerous footpaths of becoming. This is not a way to escape the self; rather, it reactivates the self in new directions, establishing new dimensions, new relationships between, within, and among selves, new designs for living, inviting periodic readjustment via improvisational creativity. One must eventually rest

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42 Jane Bennett (2001) glosses surprise as including "both a pleasant, charming feeling and a slightly off-putting sense of having been disrupted or tripped (up)" (104). Our encounters with others always have some element of this, I suspect; and Meisner's repetition exercises cultivate our attunement to surprise. Surprise is an element in her reading of enchantment, and it is little wonder that she reads Deleuze and Guattari as offering an enchantment tale, that "children seem to be born with a capacity for enchantment" (Deleuze and Guattari 2000: 168), and that Bottom and his friends seem child-like.

43 Michelle M. Dowd (2013) seems to be one of two sympathetic critics (Patterson the other). Dowd calls the play "an unexpected source of creative energy and theatrical pleasure" (Dowd 2013: 154).

back amid the comfort of one's default habits of being—that are nonetheless always enhanced by the experience of acting.

Artists as diverse as J.M. Coetzee and Barbra Streisand have noted the strengthened empathy skills in actors and fiction-writers. Coetzee even makes a savvy link to becoming-animal: "There are no bounds to the sympathetic imagination. … If I can think my way into the existence of a being who has never existed, then I can think my way into the existence of a bat or a chimpanzee or an oyster…" (Coetzee 2003: 79). Streisand ties this capacity for thinking-as-someone-else to leftist politics when she asks: "with the rise of the women's, environmental and gay rights movements, there has been an increase in artists who support liberal causes. Why is that?" Streisand argues that,

> The basic task of the artist is to explore the human condition. In order to do what we do well, the writer, the director, the actor has to inhabit other people's psyches, understand other people's problems. We have to walk in other people's shoes and live in other people's skins. This does tend to make us more sympathetic to politics that are more tolerant (Streisand 1995).

Acting methods broaden our identities, paving the way for us to embrace an *ethos* of pluralism and liberal openness.

It is best to conceptualize acting as "play," a term that designated acting in Renaissance England. Given the unaccountable nature of human agency, play is never something one has conscious control over; it is childlike, borne of an intuition that Meisner's techniques seek to re-activate and capture. To channel the play element of acting, one must be alive to the moment before you (via intuition and responsiveness) and dead to the rigid identity behind you (via acting).

However, this does not prevent that uniqueness from being appropriated into already crystallized identity categories.[44] Bottom and his friends want to be seen as "actors" yet Egeus calls them "hard-handed men [rough workmen]" (*MND* 5.2.116, 72). Nonetheless, this work on the self to become your aspirational self could be represented by the model of the actor.

Presentational Acting

Recall Habermas's association of the pre-18th century theater with the representation of monarchical figures. Representation acting privileges the power of who is being represented on stage. Presentation acting privileges the power of who represents; the stuff of stagecraft becomes the center of attention. Presentational acting is when actors break the forth wall. The actor is openly an intermediary between audience and role. The actors invite the audience to participate in the theatrical assemblage. The audience is no longer passive. In Shakespeare's plays, it is actors on the periphery of the stage who tend to wink and nod at the audience, to gain them as fellow conspirators: Richard III, Hamlet in the first three acts, Iago (Gurr 2012). It is a setting that actors share with the audience. The aside and the soliloquy are the tools of presentational acting.

Of course, this may play into Habermas' concern with the increasing ability of capitalist forces to manipulate publics and narrow the sphere for rational-critical debate. Public figures address us, but they can still do so insincerely, scheming for our vote, oiling their way through town hall meetings. But the divide between the mimetic space of center stage and the presentation space of the sidelines is shifting and productive. The spectator has a role to play. Both spectator and actor can delight in each other's presence.

[44] Warner 1999. Appropriation from without, by others, takes place despite our own identarian intentions or commitments.

Puncturing the illusion of play-acting allows for a different variety of openness. It allows the spectator a greater measure of control.

Consider the care Bottom takes to guide his audience. In the Cagney version, Cagney steps up to Theseus on the dais and confides to him the plot developments as he would to a friend (*Midsummer* 1935). The excitement Bottom has for the show is infectious. Presentational acting dissolves the spectrum which stylized and naturalistic acting occupy, meanwhile inviting more subjects into the production. By using presentational methods, directors test the audience: How much do you need to see sincere acting in order to believe a story? Presentational acting asks the audience to take delight in the stuff of the theater, in the artifice even while knowing the artifice is artifice. Presentational acting makes theater even more collaborative.

An actor's tools are many. If we conceive of the public sphere of democratic debate as a stage, then presentational acting which happens on the periphery might represent democracy's interaction with things non-democratic. We can remember that democratic debate never happens in a vacuum. If no scripted and staged performance is exactly the same night after night, then how much truer is this for a presentational performance? If the audience refuses to commiserate with a presentational actor, the show can be irreconcilable with the pervious night's show. What creates performative force are the elements outside of the specific sphere of debate or decision-making. The conditions of performance create the force of the words. Deliberative democrats do well to remember this. Drama is not merely about words—it may be least about words. Performance reconstitutes the words each time they are said in a new context, at a

different time, to a different audience. Democracy is by nature collaborative, and that means we are complicit too with the Richard IIIs or the Iagos on the periphery.

Just as dramatic performances are not primarily or essentially about utterances, neither is rational-critical debate simply about speech. Meanings result from performance—the style of performance, the conditions of performance, the conventions of performance, the history of performance, the materiality of performance. Text is transformed in the process of being acted. Acting is not simply an important dimension to the ideal speech situation. It is everything.

Conclusion: Meaning Things So Much You Have To Act

Hopefully it is clear that I am not simply making an analogy, saying that democrats should act like actors. Rather, I have explored how actorly techniques can help foster a better democracy. Each acting style has something to offer deliberative democrats. So: How can acting help us in our daily lives? Acting out scenes of daily life, especially scenes of crisis, revolution, political turmoil, can stage a plurality of forces, a constellation of elements, allowing us to see them clearly. It can be helpful for the audience seeing these scenes to think through them.

But on a more personal level, characters like Coriolanus and Cordelia show us how one may need to use acting in one's life simply to communicate certain aspects of oneself to an audience. Allan Bloom writes of the Roman: "he wants others to admire him for what he really is" (Bloom 1964: 85). They would admire him, if he could express himself in more actorly ways. When Coriolanus's mother and the senators beg him to "frame his spirit" and ask the support of the plebeians in the market place, she says, "I would dissemble with my nature where / My fortunes and my friends at stake requir'd / I

should do so in honor" (*Coriolanus* 3.2.62-64). This is both a cynical acceptance of a politician's need for public dissemblances and a critique of Coriolanus's inflexibility. Both he and Cordelia are too honest and inflexible for their own good. When Lear administers a public love test among his daughters, Cordelia is taken with "stage fright," as Thomas Dumm puts it: "Cordelia, in the position of actually loving Lear, cannot summon the ability to *pretend* to love him" (Dumm 2008: 12, emphasis original). All of us had the feeling of coming short of expressing ourselves genuinely. Something we say strikes us as fake-sounding but is in reality deeply felt. Dumm writes that it is impossible for Cordelia "to say what she fells without it feeling false to her" (Dumm 2008: 1). She cannot take the risks of the actor. And because she does not have an actor's tools, she cannot express her true feelings. Her sincerity cannot be staged, as it needs to be in order for her to successfully communicate.[45] Neither can Coriolanus. He can't perform as a warrior-hero because he thinks the *performance* of the truth will somehow actually undermine the truth, that his genuine, war-hero chops must be *concealed* to be *true*. What Coriolanus fails to realize is that it takes a little bit of acting to convey one's best self to others. Shakespeare tells us that it is acting that makes us aware more fully of who we are and who we can be. Acting skills can be essential for the tasks of genuine expressiveness. It is not deception or acting that I value *in itself*—it is my argument that the dramatic practice of acting supports interaction with others in more genuinely democratic and responsive ways, a trait needful for more open, pluralistic society. Acting is a practice

[45] Bradley calls Cordelia "exceptionally sincere and unbending" (Bradley 2007: 187) but then later calls her a liar: "Cordelia's speech not only tells much less than truth about her love, it actually perverts the truth when it implies that to give love to a husband is to take it from a father" (Bradley 2007: 244). I find Bradley's analysis to be masculinist and to demonstrate a profound lack of sensitivity to Cordelia's own feelings of being torn between husband and father. I would disagree with Bradley on both counts: Cordelia is not sincere, and this is because she tells the truth, but without the skills to carry it off.

that can end in an enriched experience as a human being and democratic citizen. The most successful characters in Shakespeare (Viola, Rosalind, Imogene, Antony in *Julius Caesar* [but not in *Antony and Cleopatra* where he loses control of his craft], even Iago could be counted) tend to be the most sincere, the most responsive actors.

If acting does make one more genuine in interactions with others, it should be the primary virtue in 21st century democratic life. Erving Goffman helps us to see why:

> A character staged in a theater is not in some ways real, nor does it have the same kind of real consequences as does the thoroughly contrived character performed by a confidence man; but the *successful* staging of either of these types of false figures involves use of *real* techniques—the same techniques by which everyday persons sustain their real social situations (Goffman 1973: 254).

Techniques: the common denominator between the real and the staged. Goffman isolates what both professional actors and real-life actors have in common: techniques of the self, which are the same in both situations. In Shakespeare's day, the similarity was more pronounced. There was no artificial proscenium frame, "a picture stage set apart from life and constituting a world of its own for the representation of mimetic story" (Burton 1914: 55). It is modern theater that immobilizes its audience, sets it at a remove, and discourages participation in the scene. It is less easy to realize today what Shakespeare must have known: that both the traffic of the stage and the traffic of real-life seek genuineness, forged out of the energies of interaction.

To end my reflections on this theme, I wish to tie together a few thoughts to demonstrate why acting is equalizing, or at least humbling. We each participate in scenes that produce the illusion of a self, a self generated by local happenings. Intuition and responsiveness sharpens our awareness of this embeddedness of self and world, the local events of our life's scenes. Human beings exist in, as Jane Bennett puts it, "an interstitial

field of non-personal, human forces, flows, tendencies, and trajectories" (Bennett 2010: 61). Bottom grasps the forces beyond human agency in his universe because those forces (symbolized by the fairies and Puck) transform him into a beast. Puck shares the ability to enter into animal becomings, for he bestows that ability on Bottom: "Sometimes a horse I'll be, sometimes a hound, / A hog, a headless bear…" (*MND* 3.1.96-97). It is true that, as Montrose notes, Oberon, Titania, and Puck express a top-down form of absolutist, sovereign power, forcing the humans of the play into bodies and forms against their will (the fairies are setting their own stage), but it is also true that Bottom seems to affirm that power, playfully saying, "I willed it thus!" (Nietzsche 2008). After all, he fancies transforming that experience into a ballad, "Bottom's Dream." When we broaden our identities the way Bottom does, derigidify them to better enter pluralist assemblages, we also learn a sympathy with our surroundings, an appreciation for the interconnectedness of participants in the scene—whether those be lifeless forces like wind and rain or animal beings like asses and "Bottoms."

In his novels, James Hilton captures this well (Hilton 1951; Hilton 1941). When he writes of stylized actors, he speaks of them as being realer than real—characters covered in the rich cloth of stereotype.[46] This is not quite overacting; it can be sincere although it may not seem so. But do the subtle distinctions between the real and the too real always hold? Do they always matter? The "too real" can serve a purpose—as when another of Hilton's characters, not a professional actor, must act in order to be sincere. She says: "You think I'm acting, don't you? [an indication maybe she has been "too real"] And you think that means I'm not sincere? You don't understand that sometimes I

[46] I am thinking here of how he describes the working-class acting troupe in *Random Harvest* (Hilton 1941).

mean things so much I *have* to act?" (Hilton 1951: 316, emphasis original). Acting is not about faking. Acting is trying to make something happen. It can be about genuine expressiveness, whether that registers as fake or "too real" to someone else. We do not know how our words or actions will be judged, hence their perlocutionary force. The Habermasian argument that you need to assume everyone is sincere for the ideal situation of communicative action doesn't take into account that even when people are acting, there can be heartfelt sincerity.

Here it is important to remember that there is no such thing as an "inappropriate" response as long as one is responsive to the moment. Titus Andronicus laughs when he exhausts his supply of tears after his daughter has been raped, her tongue cut out, and her arms lopped off. His brother reacts to his laughter with, "Why dost thou laugh? It fits not with this hour" (*Titus Andronicus* 3.1.264), as if he would police the "right" and the "wrong" response. But life is full of "wrong" lines, moments of misunderstanding, impasse. What we judge as "right," or as "good" depends on context, imagination, and serendipity too. Interpretations change. Each time one performs, it is different. Things transpire that no one intends. All we can do is begin, begin dialogue, begin action, without conditions of control, but hopefully with a good sense of our surroundings.

Actors, I argue, can be models for a democratic responsiveness, intuitiveness, and creativity. The practice of acting, embodied in these methods, is a technique of self that leads to the advancement of common life, of responsiveness to others and a renewed appreciation of their value. Character is not a fixed locus of meaning but a process. Democracy requires a flexibility of character, and there is an irreverence, a flexibility that actors have. *Pace* Habermas, one can easily foster democratic character traits—empathy,

responsiveness, sincerity—with illusions, untruths, and fantasy. In theater, none of the roles are more authentic or original, Deleuze says. Hierarchies collapse. We open ourselves to the new and undiscovered, like explorers, but also like creators. Jack Nicolson says, "I like to play people that haven't existed yet, a future something, a cusp character" (Nicolson quoted in McDougal 2008: 130). As democrats in crisis time, we are all cusp characters, incipient characters, striving characters. We all have the potential for new democratic becomings, for cusp characters, for performances of a lifetime.

Comic courage

"Comedy is and should be a dangerous business."
—Michael Moore

Courage is rarely identified as essential to democracy, or to liberal politics. It is seldom embraced as a valued feature of leadership or citizenship. Both the general public and political theorists today, respectively, generally give little thought to courage.

But when they do, they take courage seriously. That is to say, they consider it meaningful, poignant, even sometimes existential, as when Richard Avramenko writes: "Courage appeals because, once expressed in its most poignant form, it reveals the possibility of increased vitality and consequently the possibility of *deepened meaning in one's life*" (Avramenko 2011: 64, my emphasis). There is often a depth and profoundness, even solemnity, to the courage they praise, or—if they fear a courage that gets out of hand—caution against. Even if circumspect concerning the moral content of courage, they implicitly posit genre space around the acts of courage. They locate it within a genre, usually either tragedy or melodrama. It is my argument that the kind of courage political theorists celebrate remains tethered to a too-narrow conception of genre.

Although courage might at first seem to be an immutable trait, then, this chapter aims to show how courage as a concept is refashioned based on the literary genre in which it appears. A "genre," as I understand it, is a modality of representing particular interpersonal and transpersonal dynamics, experiences, and affective phenomena; it organizes disparate narrative elements within a story and presents them in such a way that they become recognizable as a particular form or style that can be used to classify and describe a number of artistic works and performances. While works falling under the

rubric may not exhibit *all* the genre's characteristic features, we might privilege a certain work as the genre's quintessential form.

I elucidate aspects of courage expressed through three different genres: tragedy, melodrama, and comedy. First, I give a brief history of how theorists, from Aristotle to George Steiner, have talked about the genres of tragedy and comedy. Although "melodrama" is not an early modern generic category (it would perhaps be more historically faithful to discuss the morality plays that allegorized vice and virtue figures in Christian doctrine and depicted these as absolutes), it becomes essential when talking about production history, and how Shakespeare's *Tragedy of Julius Caesar*, in particular, has been reappropriated for modern audiences. I then show how political theorists have presented courage in a serious mood and claim that courage is most likely to be recognized as courage when it is portrayed in a solemn, melodramatic cast; when its bearers are committed to the rightness of their cause; and when they assume apodictic bearings and carry through in a resolute manner. This is what Avramenko does, for example. My final moves give an account of what I call comic courage, when comedy becomes an engine for a certain kind of courage, and the way Shakespeare dramatizes experiences and events in the light of this courage. These dramatizations can help us think anew about democratic virtues and ways we might trigger nascent democratic modes and styles today. Shakespeare's writing paradoxically gives us access to experiences—experiences that take place in the otherwise aristocratic communities within which these plays are set and with which they are concerned—that could allow us to imagine democratic virtues. Especially in the abridged and imperiled democracy of the US today, an irreverence to set roles and a mood of playfulness—in both senses of the

word: improvisatory, light, but also, *like a play*—displayed by Shakespearean characters like Rosalind and Falstaff can offer a model of an *ethos* of equality and democratic possibility.

Comedy and tragedy: roots and meanings

Narrative elements can be separated from genre, defined by tone, context, and expectations. The bare actions of physical courage—for example, throwing a punch—are extractable and can look the same in each genre. In this sense, "courage" is portable from one genre to the other. But the world of comedy exposes aspects of courage in a way that the world of tragedy does not. Genre modulates the courage it depicts. Courage in the comedic world is rewarded with marriage or joy of some kind (e.g., in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, the ascent of the soul to God). Courage in a tragedy often earns its bearers death. Accordingly, then, courage is valued differently. It sometimes has no use-value in tragedy.

Aristotle's *Poetics* links comedy to democracy and what is common (Aristotle 2002). Tragedy is an elevated vision of humans and comedy is a degraded one. (This seems to have both moral dimensions—comedy is about humankind's "shameful" qualities and concerns the "base" and "lowly" in social status and rank [Aristotle 2002: 1448a 34, 32.) Although Aristotle breezily dismisses the origins of comedy, "because it was of no stature from the beginning," several notices about comedy in ancient literary history say that while "tragedy dissolves life, comedy puts it together" (Aristotle 2002: 1449b 1, p.15n42). Extrapolating from this ancient wisdom, comedy perhaps holds more promise for theorizing or, better yet, *dramatizing* democracy today, assessing its constellations and coordinates, the forces latent within the multifaceted concept: self-

government, fairness, equality, self-questioning, checks and balances. Holding all these elements in tension propels democracies forward, lends them energy and dynamism. Comedy puts things together, makes a pattern of the interpersonal and subjective material at hand, brings people together in a laugh or a joke, makes them accomplices and rivals. Aristotle speaks of the Dorians who claim that comedians wandered "from village to village" (Aristotle 2002: 1448a 39), outlying districts, whereas tragedians seem to be more centrally located, static. Aristotle links comedy more explicitly to democracy when he says that comedy has been alleged to have originated under a democracy: "the local Megarians make a claim to comedy as having emerged at the time of their democracy" (Aristotle 2002: 1448a 31-32).

Dante, in his letter to Cangrande that prefaces *The Divine Comedy*, gives us a similar etymology of the genre of comedy: "'comedy' comes from *komos*, 'village' and *oda*, which means 'song,' whence 'comedy' sort of means 'country song'" (Dante 2015: par. 9). Again, the root of comedy is located in the village, the *komos*, and its speech, Dante says, tends to be "loose and humble" in order to best represent (and speak to) the people (Dante 2015: par. 9). Dante used the title *La commedia* for his epic poem because, although his subject was serious and religious, it was written in the vernacular rather than in an elevated mode or in Latin. There is an attention to gender in Dante's discussion of comedy: He writes, "it is in the vulgar tongue, in which also women communicate" (Dante 2015: par. 10). Comedy, then, is not as exclusionary along gender lines as tragedy would seem to be, in Dante's opinion.

If comedy is linked to the village, the common people, and to democracy, then what about tragedy? Tragedy has often meant for its critics what they want it to mean,

based on their judgments and hopes for the present, and as such it has suffered its share of anachronistic readings.[47] Peter Euben takes Attic tragedy as a model for theorizing politics because tragedies, like democratic citizens, do not grasp at final solutions or explanations and they embrace uncertainty (Euben 1990). Indeed, Dennis Schmidt argues that the turn to tragedy in contemporary philosophy has been precipitated by philosophy's growing doubts concerning the value of reason and method as basic premises, and tragedy's ability to speak to those doubts, given its themes of human error and epistemological limitations (Schmidt 2001). Some contemporary theorists prize tragedy for its rejection of absolute judgments and well-defined choices between right and wrong, following Hegel's thesis that tragedy dramatizes the conflict between goods or equally legitimate rights rather than a moral clash of good and evil.[48]

But other critics reject tragedy for its conservatism, as did feminist scholars who viewed tragedy as necessarily involving masculine hubris, the fall of the supposedly autonomous, self-creating "great man."[49] Others view tragedy as apolitical: Raymond

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[47] See authors cited below for examples. For a less anachronistic and more historical (but nonetheless theoretical) view of tragedy, see Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet's study *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece* (1990). They argue that Attic tragedy "introduces a new types of spectacle into the system of the city-state's public festivals. Furthermore, as a specific form of human expression it conveys hitherto unrecognized aspects of human experience; it marks a new stage in the development of inner man and of the responsible agent" (Vernant and Vidal-Naquet 1990: 23). This is what Harold Bloom argues Shakespeare'e work does in the Renaissance, or what Habermas argues letter-writing, diary-writing, and the epistolary novel did in the 18th century—develops the idea of inner man, develops a richness to our subjectivity that never existed before that point in time. It is easy to raise an eyebrow to these claims (Bloom 1998; Habermas 1989).

[48] See Terry Eagleton's (2003) claims about modern democracy as that which multiplies our choices and therefore our potential to make regrettable judgments. Martha Nussbaum (1981: 5) also notes the multiplication of incompatible goods as a quotidian part of our existence. Christopher Rocco (1997) turns to tragedy as a way of shedding light on the conflicts within democracy and false polarizations in Enlightenment thought.

[49] Many of these feminist studies, however, in addition to showing Greek tragedy's support of a male dominated social structure and the genre's and previous critics' androcentricism, also sought to show the ways female agency was enacted and highlighted spaces of feminine resistance to male structures. See Rabinowitz, 1993; Wohl 1998; Foley 2001. Kahn 1981 examines Shakespearean manliness from a psychoanalytic perspective, including a chapter on the downfalls of Coriolanus and Macbeth. Some early 20th century thinkers viewed tragedy as (conservatively) transcendent, such as Maud Bodkin (1963) and

Williams argues that in the 20th century, we see "the ordinary separation of social thinking and tragic thinking" (Williams 2006: 63). Tragedy's fatalism was rejected. According to Williams, "The most influential kinds of explicitly social thinking have often rejected tragedy as in itself defeatist" (ibid.). Tragedy teaches us that mankind's attempts to change the human condition are hopeless. As literary theorist Kenneth Burke writes, a tragic "frame of acceptance admonished one to 'resign' himself to a sense of his limitations" (Burke 1937: 39). Williams is also writing against critic George Steiner who sees tragedy as uninterested in everyday social and political life (Williams 2006: 48). More recently but in a similar vein, French historian Nicole Loraux takes aim at critics who, she argues, unduly politicize Athenian tragedy. Loraux instead describes Attic tragedy as anti-political in the sense that it concerns itself with antagonisms and rejects civic ideologies and duties (Loraux 2002).

Given the impossibility of avoiding such proleptic attributions, especially given tragedy's great variety in its politics, conventions, and experiences, I focus on a few key attributes of Greek tragedy (agreeing with George Steiner when he says that, "nearly till the moment of their decline, the tragic forms are Hellenic" [Steiner 1996: 3]) that seem to garner critical consensus: its aristocratic protagonists, its masculinism, the way courage supports hierarchy, its serious mood, the quest for moral meaning, for justice and expiation, and its linearity. These will come out below in my reading of two Shakespeare tragedies, *Hamlet* and *Julius Caesar*.

But I also index below the waning availability of tragedy today and, following Peter Brooks, consider melodrama (and, I would add, even comedy) to be our

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John S. Smart, who writes, that tragedy has "the power to suggest something illimitable, to place life against a background of eternity..." (1922: 36). I am indebted to Eagleton (2003) for drawing my attention to Bodkin and Smart.

contemporary version of tragedy (Brooks 1976: xv). Tragedy has been largely supplanted by the new form of melodrama. Steiner goes so far as to say that we cannot have authentic tragedies today. True tragedy must be bleak and insufferably pessimistic. According to his categorization, even many of Shakespeare's plays are too diluted, as they mix "[t]he real and the fantastic, the tragic and the comic, the noble and the vile" (Steiner 1996: 21-22). It is not that there have been no tragic authors since "the age of Shakespeare and Racine," Steiner says; it is that the tragic spirit has evaporated. In modern times, with the belief in progress and the advance of reason, we no longer possess the view, generally, of "the image of man as unwanted in life" (Steiner 1996: xi). If tragedy is impossible today, then it could not be the genre within which contemporary understandings of courage appear.

Before I shift discussion to melodramatic courage in the work of contemporary political theorists, let me offer a few preliminary remarks about the genre of melodrama. In contrast to tragedy, a classical mode, melodrama is a modern genre. Melodrama, in Peter Brooks' influential characterization, responds to a modern longing for a clear and legible moral universe in the wake of the death of the sacred and other postmodern losses such as progressive notions of history (Brooks 1976: 20). As the world comes to feel out of joint, we seek all the more for a sense of place and time, of rightness in our actions and beliefs. Melodrama recognizes virtue and innocence in a post-sacred drive for a recovered moralism. Hence the moral absolutism and transparency in which the hero is coded as good while his opponent is coded as bad.

Political theorists on courage

Political theorists influenced by Hannah Arendt, one of the few thinkers to value courage wholeheartedly in the past century, tend to see courage as essential for action, speech, and freedom in the public sphere (Arendt 1998: 186-7; see also Bickford 1996). I begin with Arendt because her conception of courage shares elements of each genre under discussion and, because of its patent rejection of authenticity, will help me to illuminate "comic courage" later in the chapter.

As Andrew Sabl points out, Arendt's reading of courage grows out of her experiences in interwar Germany, of what she calls "Dark Times": "the disorder and the hunger, the massacres and the slaughterers, the outrage over injustice and the despair '*when there was only wrong* and no outrage'" (Sabl 2006; Arendt 1968: viii, my emphasis).[50] Arendt here casts courage as a tool in the fight against injustice in a moral universe of black and white: in this it seems melodramatic. But, in her concern with a masculine conception of "greatness," Arendt's courage also partakes of traditionally tragic elements: She cites with approval Machiavelli's location of courage "in the rise 'of the Condottiere from low condition to high rank,' from privacy to princedom, that is, from circumstances common to all men to the shining glory of great deeds" (Arendt 1998: 35). Because the public sphere is a place where "great deeds" can manifest, and because it takes courage to leave one's home and venture into this realm, courage, for her, is "one of the most elemental political attitudes" (ibid). *Pace* Avramenko, courage is not what it is has been for scores of theorists: "Courage is a big word, and I do mean the daring of adventure which gladly risks life for the sake of being as thoroughly and intensely alive as one can be only in the face of danger and death" (Arendt 1993: 156). Courage may entail danger and risk, but not of the swashbuckling variety. Courage is not

[50] I am indebted to Sabl's (2006) discussion of courage in Arendt's scholarship.

an exciting choice; it is a basic demand that the public realm makes upon each citizen. Even cowards can display what she calls this "original courage" of stepping out into the public realm—even more so (Arendt 1998: 186-7). As I shall show below, it is precisely cowards like Rosalind and Falstaff whose comic courage transvalues courage itself in its refusal to submit to the cultural surround.

Richard Avramenko, in his study of courage as a virtue, takes the opposite view of Arendt. It is precisely courage's ability to satisfy our personal sense of vitality, the thrilling risk to one's existence, the intensity and exhilaration courage makes possible, that makes it "the existential virtue par excellence" (Avramenko 2011: 9). To be courageous requires a willingness to relinquish that highest of all goods, life itself. As Avramenko puts it, "self-interested courage is not courage" (Avramenko 2011: 55). One's courageous sacrifice of life betrays some fundamental care or good worthy of death. Hence the enduring appeal of war: War demands the utmost one can give. Both Avramenko and Kateb turn to an account of WWII by J. Glenn Gray: on Gray's view, in Kateb's reading, "War…has more to do with human *greatness of stature* than almost any other activity and is indissociable from all other *great activities*" (Kateb 2004: 61, my emphasis). Again, courage is associated with great deeds, as in tragedy.

Avramenko divides courage chronologically into four categories: martial (exemplified by Greek warriors), political (as seen in Greek political thought), moral (here he turns to Rousseau), and economic (Tocqueville is the exemplar). Easiest to link to the tragic genre is martial courage; as Judith Shklar writes, military courage "is so vital to every aristocratic character" (Shklar 1984: 234). Recall the above-listed attributes of Hellenic tragedy: its aristocrats, its masculinism, its linearity. But it is not tragic courage

that Avramenko finds in today's democracies. Avramenko turns to Tocqueville to describe the difference between aristocracies and democracies in ancestral terms. "[I]n aristocracy there is a historical connectedness that naturally makes men feel linked to the past" (Avramenko 2011: 217). One's temporal horizons are broader as one feels connected with ancestors and duty-bound toward those in the future. This is the stuff of revenge tragedy: e.g., Hamlet's need to avenge his father's death. Democracies, by contrast, "make men forget their ancestors" (Tocqueville quoted in Avramenko 2011: 218). In contemporary democracy, and for contemporary political theorists, courage is not a thing prompted by vengeance or the defense of aristocratic honor.

Even so, to be courageous one must be selfless (seen as morally good) and take a "resolute stand" on an issue one feels to be of the utmost importance (Avramenko 2011: 255). For Avramenko, all the historical dimensions still live in the contemporary idea of courage. Many cultures today still kill to defend and preserve their honor and think of themselves as courageous in doing so. Courage is still, he notes, "bound up with manliness" (Avramenko 2011: 236). There is a transcendent dimension to Avramenko's courage: "Courage elevates the soldier above the general run of mankind" (ibid). The soldier "transcends" his own immediate self-interest, leading Avramenko to conclude that "martial courage is axiomatically good and worth emulation. When all is said and done, to be courageous and unselfish is *a good thing*" (ibid, my emphasis). Avramenko's need to cloak even an ancient, aristocratic notion of courage in "axiomatic goodness" bears witness to an enduring need in democracies today to find clear examples of good and bad—hence the popularity of melodrama. Courage gives us our moral "grounding,"

Avramenko says, revealing what we collectively hold most dear as worth giving our lives for (Avramenko 2011: 237).

George Kateb delineates more explicitly a moral version of physical courage. He argues that only when such courage is moral can it be classified as a virtue (Kateb 2004: 66). Rather than value war for war's sake (battlefield courage is "organized criminality," he says [Kateb 2004: 64]), he considers activities like space exploration, peaceful political acts of resistance, and even suicide as examples of virtuous physical courage. "Courage is not only a practical necessity, it is also an enlargement of humanity. The task is to confine it morally" (Kateb 2004: 68). Seeking to recover the moral dimension of courage, Kateb's prose often partakes of melodramatic notions of the stark divide between "innocence" and "wickedness." It is tragedy that makes this distinction harder to discern: as James Baldwin says of *Julius Caesar*: "the play does not even suggest that we have the perception to know evil from good or that such a distinction can ever be clear" (Baldwin 2010: 67). But Kateb writes as if distinctions between evil and good were plain: For example, battlefield courage, he says, "is usually displayed by combatants who are inwardly innocent. They do not typically intend wickedness, even though most of the time wickedness is what results from their deeds" (Kateb 2004: 50). Kateb uses these moral categories without a second thought.

When considering war, Kateb claims, "the moral question of the rightness of the cause in which self-sacrifice figures is paramount" (Kateb 2004: 59). If this risk to life and limb is what made courage "great" for Avramenko, and therefore cast courage in a tragic register, then the moral stakes, the thoughtful consideration of "the rightness of the cause," in Kateb's account, are what make courage melodramatic. Kateb speaks in what

he calls "the moral voice" and seeks "expressions of physical courage that are in fact dissociable from war and battlefield courage, that *show forth human greatness*, and that also are moral or compatible with morality" (Kateb 2004: 61, my emphasis). Like Avramenko, Kateb does not want to relinquish the ancient Greek tragic linkage of courage to "human greatness," but he rejects the lack of morality associated with war. Kateb even speaks in a quasi-religious register of benefits to the "soul" (Kateb 2004: 64). I am not saying that it is inappropriate or silly of Kateb to make claims about morality, but only that his quest for morality in the acts of courage takes on melodramatic shades. When Kateb describes the victims of degenerative diseases or concentration camps as "totally innocent" (Kateb 2004: 71), for example, I simply ask if this is really possible because it seems over-stated, and over-statement is a key element of melodrama.

Judith Shklar, who, like Kateb, does not champion courage wholesale, applauds the courage of nonviolent dissidents. Military courage (like Caesar's) is aristocratic, while moral courage is "democratic and wholly peaceful" (Shklar 1984: 234), and protects us from fear—which corrupts liberal regimes. This is not quite Kateb's courage of innocence and evil, but it does still entail a moral bravery to stand up against wrongdoing. Shklar says courage is essential for democratic dissidents: "If citizens are to act…especially in a democracy, to protest and block any sign of governmental illegality and abuse, they must have a fair share of moral courage…" (Shklar quoted in Scorza 2001: 645). The desire to search out wrongdoing need not imply innocence against evil, as it seems to in Kateb's account: for Shklar, moral courage requires resolve and tenacity in the face of uncertainty (instead of embracing that uncertainty as theorists of tragedy like Euben would ask of political participants).

Holloway Sparks goes further than Shklar in theorizing what she calls "an ethic of political courage" as a vital element of democratic participation (Sparks 1997: 74). She looks specifically at Rosa Parks as a model for dissenting democratic action. In her view, democracy is revitalized by the moral energies of dissenting citizens. Sparks speaks of the religious language used by participants in the Montgomery bus boycott: "The ministers often used the language of 'turning the other cheek,' and 'loving your enemies' when speaking about nonviolence. The combination of citizenship and religious language proved powerful; segregationist whites had to do discursive battle with two frameworks that occupied sacred positions in U.S. politics" (Sparks 1997: 91). This theological register of "enemies" versus the implied "friends," the "sacred" as opposed to the profane, allowed protesters to stand firm because they were seen as speaking truth to power, power being defined as evil and truth as good. I do not take issue with the description of racism or other forms of oppression as irredeemably bad (it goes without saying that they are), but only with the way in which evidence of that badness is used to bolster those on the "opposite" side of the fight as morally pure and innocent and above reproach. Sides cannot so easily be taken in all circumstances; and taking sides presumptively often short-circuits much-needed dialogue and an exchange of views (however unpalatable some of those views may seem). But the moral language of black and whites, the belief that dissidents unambiguously possessed "the right to protest for right" (Sparks 1997: 90) that so motivated scores of protesters, makes it harder to adopt or even bear witness to a separate point of view. One need not compromise one's principles to bridge the divide through dialogue.

Sparks describes courage as "a commitment to resolution and persistence in the face of risk, uncertainty, or fear" (Sparks 1997: 76). But confirming one's position and commitment to a moral good in a world of stark black-and-whites often leads one to adopt the bearings of an unhealthily passionate personal conviction of and belief in one's righteousness. "To dissent when one faces domination and oppression marks a level of commitment to participatory democracy rarely matched by nondissenting citizens" (Sparks 1997: 83). But is it so democratic—that is, does it lead to the flourishing of multiple points of view—when conscientious dissenters hold too strongly to a firm notion of right that becomes unbending and static? Sparks cites approvingly Socrates's brand of civic courage as a disposition to be persistent and steadfast in what one believes (Sparks 1997: 93). This requires rigid conviction. Thus, Sparks' dissentious (what I would call melodramatically tinged) courage has an unpolitical, undemocratic tendency towards apodictic modes and bearings.

Sparks's dissentious courage is akin to what Jason A. Scorza calls "conscientious citizenship" (Scorza 2001). Scorza delineates three varieties within political courage specifically: the courage of patriotic citizens (sustained by loyalty to the nation), pragmatic leaders (sustained by commitment to official duty), and conscientious citizens (sustained by a commitment to moral principles), which he notes sometimes conflict. Although Scorza says he desires to laden courage with "very little normative content" and protests that he is not a moral philosopher seeking to weave courage into broader theoretical fabrics of morality or justice (Scorza 2001: 640), as he contextualizes courage, its melodramatic shades surface.

Scorza first considers patriotism as a source of courage. Leaders since the time of Pericles have sought to promote courage in a patriotic citizenry, to rejuvenate the polity. In Athens, Pericles inspired citizens to be brave citizen-soldiers by evoking a firm love of country in his Funeral Oration: "You must daily fix your gaze upon the power of Athens and become lovers of her, and when the vision of her greatness has inspired you, reflect that all this has been acquired by men of courage…" (Pericles quoted in Scorza 2001: 648). The greatness of the state (the bountiful "all this") is like a sun that throws its rays over everyone, allowing citizens to prosper by making them courageous, even as the citizens ennoble the state with their courage. The state is both the achieved ideal and the originary motive for courage, both its most beloved recipient and its greatest advocate. Scorza admits that this kind of courage, often stemming from blind loyalty to one's country and can be used by leaders for immoral ends. But leaders, as Pericles does, often impress on citizens both a firm sense of right and the "greatness" of the cause, a combination of both tragic and melodramatic features.

Scorza then considers "the courage of pragmatic leadership," and here he cites John F. Kennedy's *Profiles in Courage* as a source of case studies in such courage. This is a melodramatic brand of courage, despite being sustained "by an often amoral commitment to official duty" (Scorza 2001: 651). Scorza gives as an example Daniel Webster's support for the Compromise of 1850, in which Webster took a stand for national stability even as it went against his own ideas of equality and human dignity (Scorza 2001: 651). But such courage need not be reactionary: another case is West Germany's reparations agreement with Israel, when took place when only 29 percent of the West German population believed Jews were owed restitution from Germany. Or

the Kennedy administration drafting civil rights legislation in the midst of heated struggles in the South. Sometimes the courage of unpopular, undemocratic decision-making can serve democratic ends—and be justified in moral, melodramatic terms. When Congressman John Lewis received the Profile in Courage Award for his leadership during the civil rights struggles, he said:

> Courage is a reflection of the heart. It is a reflection of something deep within the man or woman or even a child who must resist and must defy an authority that is morally wrong. Courage makes us march on despite fear and doubt on the road toward justice. Courage is not heroic, but as necessary as birds need wings to fly. Courage is not rooted in reason but rather courage comes from a divine purpose to make things right (Lewis quoted in Kennedy 2006: 237).

Here is courage couched in the moral language of right-versus-wrong, of divine justice and purpose, of emotional knowledge versus a dispassionate, disinterested reason. By attributing courage to God ("divine purpose"), he bestows greater meaning on his actions. In times of turmoil, during crises of meaning, the courage to act often receives divine sanction from actors. This can be dangerous when orthodox, inflexible ideas surface regarding what constitutes justice. Justice is defined as what God wants, which shores up courage. When leaders draw the terms of moral justice so starkly, they can both inspire citizen patriots and justify their decisions to their constituents.

Congressman Lewis straddles the fence between "pragmatic leaders" and "conscientious citizens," who display the most blatantly moral form of courage. Here the exemplars include Emerson, Thoreau, and the followers of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Just as do Sparks's dissidents, conscientious citizens "stick to their own principles" (Scorza 2001: 652). Scorza notes the potential danger "in getting carried away"—"the potential for fanaticism, which closes potentially open minds" (Scorza 2001: 654). The

stubbornness and moral rigidity—even fervor—in this kind of courage also place it within a melodramatic cast.

We can more clearly understand, then, from the preceding overview of various theories of the political virtue of courage, the reason why, as Scorza says, "The language of courage…has always been an affective means for motivating people" (Scorza 2001: 642). It is the language of right and wrong, of friends and enemies, of victims and villains, innocents and evil-doers, that motivates political actors to take a stand. This is courageous, but its tropes and dynamics draw from characteristic features of the melodramatic mode. Traditional accounts of the varieties of courage, encapsulated above, overlook the question of literary genre, which, as I shall argue in more detail below, shapes the substance and political impact of courage. I now turn to Shakespeare. As I will show, the social functions of courage as they are presented in Shakespeare's plays, and thus, courage's potential for democratic culture, come to the fore in different genres of presentation.

Tragic courage: the case of Caesar

The character of Julius Caesar provides an example of tragic courage. This is the militaristic, masculinist courage of aristocratic protagonists. It takes a serious tone, as this courage searches for fixed meaning. Recall Avramenko: "Courage appeals because…it reveals…the possibility of deepened meaning in one's life." Caesar is renowned for his courage in battle, and "War…has more to do with human greatness of stature than almost any other activity and is indissociable from all other great activities" (Kateb 2004 paraphrasing Gray 61). For just this reason, Allan Bloom argues, Shakespeare turned to

the Romans for models. "The Romans were the greatest political people who ever existed," and Caesar was "the greatest of these great men" (Bloom 1964: 78).[51]

Caesar's courage: 1) arrogates power to itself; 2) requires a public display of an impossible independence and heroism; 3) is always masculinized; 4) takes a serious tone and shows an enmity towards laughter; 5) holds to a firm notion of right and wrong that lends itself to overly moralistic inflections; and 6) requires a strong ontology of the subject

Shakespeare's play describes a ceremony in which citizens offer Caesar a crown three times—which bears witness to Caesar's growing power. The political integrity of republicanism has yielded to the exigencies of tragic courage and its need for conspicuous displays of power. Tragic courage not only demands scenes of unshakable power but also pretends to an impervious independence. Weakness presents an insuperable impediment to heroic expression. Cassius complains to Brutus of Caesar's epileptic fits and his failure to swim as far as Cassius: "it doth amaze me / A man of such a feeble temper should / So get the start of the majestic world" (*JC* 1.2.130-133). A reputation for manly courage is surely stained by a "feeble" anything. Cassius has no sense of consecration when speaking of Caesar precisely because Caesar's weakness undermines his majesty. Caesar's hyper-masculine heroics attempt to compensate for his native frailty.[52]

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[51] *Pace* Bloom, Shakespeare does not offer such clear images of heroic action from a humanist tradition. Rather, as Timothy Hampton notes, Shakespeare "leaves us with a melancholic nostalgia for aristocratic excellence and the world of great souls" (Hampton 1990: 233). The souls of his play seem compromised, their greatness diluted. "The only moment at which Caesar's extraordinary courage is recalled is in his remark to his wife Calpurnia" (ibid., 216) before he goes to the Senate—a remark which resonates in a context that underlines Caesar's private frailties (his deafness in the left ear, his epileptic fits, his illness in Spain, his inability to swim as far as Cassius).

[52] Relatedly, Mary Beth Rose (2002) has examined two dimensions of heroic identity as portrayed in England from the late sixteenth to the late seventeenth centuries, what she calls an heroics of action

Tragic courage requires a certain dignity, a patrician air, and such men typically wear the somber mien of a man headed for the gallows. When Decius Brutus insists to know the cause of Caesar's decision to refrain from going to the senate, he says, “Most mighty Caesar, let me know some cause, / Lest I be laughed at when I tell them so” (*JC* 2.2.69-70). He knows this will bait the dictator because laughter at Decius Brutus is laughter at Caesar. Heroes who are laughing-stocks are heroes no longer. Foibles or mistakes weaken a heroic reputation. Laughter is an affront to one’s authority.

The spectacle of tragic courage also presents a polarized world of good and evil. The confederacy of courage and righteousness goes back to Aristotle. For him, to be courageous presumes a firm notion of right. The courageous man is one “who endures and fears the right things, for the right motive, in the right manner, at the right time” (Aristotle 1962: 1115b). This formulation leaves cowardice on the wrong side of the moral equation, even as it raises the question of interpretation as to the “rightness” of an action—a central concern of the play. Possessing courage requires commitment, conviction, the unwavering belief in the right (usually in the face of massive threats to goodness and justice). Caesar thinks he is “right” in ignoring the oracle and going to the senate as usual. The more conviction in one’s “rightness,” the more courage. Heroic leaders are always on the right side of history, according to their rhetoric. Fastening one’s hopes to a certain historical outcome galvanizes collective action. Courage consecrates one’s ideals, whose defense, in turn, requires courage. Nietzsche even goes so far as to say, “it is the good war that hallows any cause” rather than the other way around

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(gendered male) and a heroics of suffering (gendered female). To put it crudely, heroic action pertains to the prerogative of killing, heroic suffering, of dying. In *Julius Caesar*, the male characters embody an heroics of action while Brutus’s wife Portia takes the heroics of suffering to the extreme—first by stabbing herself in the thigh and then by swallowing hot coals.

(Nietzsche 2008: 33)—that is, courage displayed in war argues for the rightness of a cause and needs no motivation other than itself. I think no clear cause-and-effect structure exists between courage and rightness, although actors are always ready to invent one.

Orson Welles, for his 1937 production, begins with an imperious Caesar's first line, demanding quiet: "Bid every noise be still!" (*JC* 1.2.16; France 2001: 108). Welles omits Caesar's admission to Antony of being unable to hear in his left ear, one of a few moments in Shakespeare's play that undercuts Caesar's pretensions to godliness (France 2001). We see instead a fearless man, firm and uncompromising, saying to Antony, "I rather tell thee what is to be feared / Than what I fear; for *always I am Caesar*" (*JC* 1.2.212-13, emphasis mine; France 2001: 117). This is a monumental, ahistorical (that is, appropriate at any historical juncture) notion of greatness well befitting his tragic courage. Welles, by associating Caesar with Benito Mussolini and Brutus with democratic government, intended for Caesar to appear as an over-reaching autocrat.

While Caesar's aristocratic courage demands a strong ontology of the moral subject, on my reading, Shakespeare exposes how there is at the heart of the self a vacancy, a vacuum unfulfillable. Shakespeare's Caesar assumes an overbearing constancy—"always I am Caesar"—but one great act is never enough. If greatness entails courage, then the constant propulsion to prove one's courage/greatness issues in attempts to always out-do oneself. No reclining on laurels. Actions must be constantly renewed, to no end. "[D]anger knows full well / That Caesar is more dangerous than he…." (*JC* 2.2.44-45), Caesar says imperiously, resolving to out-danger danger: But does he? Why is Caesar compelled to verbalize this to Calpurnia, as if to testify to his full worth as a courageous man? There thus appears a lack at the heart of this ancient virtue that requires

its possessor to continually strive to fill it with new conquests and exploits. “Caesar should be a beast without a heart, / If he should stay at home to-day for fear,” Caesar says (*JC* 2.2.42-43). Caesar fears a lack of courage at his own center, the lack of a heart—the etymology of courage being the Latin “cor” for “heart.” With a savage irony, Caesar’s image announces a vacancy at the center of tragic courage and greatness in their ancient forms—but it also marks his continued, never-ending quest to find a heart in the beast, to find a center of meaning in the abyss of subjectivity.

We are now in a position to briefly summarize what we have learned about tragic courage from the example of Caesar: it is militaristic, masculinist, serious, moralistic, attempts to locate fixed meaning in a universe fundamentally unstable, is supported by an intense hierarchy (and supports that hierarchy in turn), and requires a spectacle of an heroic independence and a model of strong and decisive subjectivity.

Julius Caesar as melodrama

I wish now to briefly light up the difference between three moments in the time of *Julius Caesar*. First there was the political moment in Roman history when Julius Caesar was assassinated. History exists without genre, although as told in narrative, it can be given a genre-framework by observers. It might be depicted with the colors of the tragic if one is sympathetic to Caesar or interprets his demise as the end of the republic, but there are various interpretations. Then there is the Renaissance retelling of that moment in a history play, classified as “tragedy” by Shakespeare. This takes place in the context of a monarchy and is at odds with itself about the allure and the problems of imagining other political forms (i.e., republics) from within a monarchy. Finally, there is a third

moment, an afterlife of *Julius Caesar* where the play is mobilized in WWII and Cold War contexts for various propagandistic uses.

Today, Caesar's tragic courage (and, I would argue, tragic courage in general) registers as old hat and superfluous, signifying a former era, a bloody, battlefield courage. This is perhaps why liberal political theorists speak little of the virtue. To us moderns, it seems foolhardy, though such courage used to serve as an index of one's worthiness as a citizen. Mid-century American productions of *Julius Caesar*—in large part because they do not play as tragedies anymore—pay Caesar's courage much less attention, as if to say, this courage is not relevant to us today.[53]

Moreover, *Julius Caesar* often plays as melodrama today. Welles turned *Julius Caesar* into sheer melodrama where good = Brutus and evil = Caesar. Welles, by setting the play on the contemporary political scene, makes that distinction plain. In his 1937 production, Brutus represents the fulfillment of history's *telos*, from absolute kingship/tyranny to modern republican democracy. Not only Welles's edits to the script but his theatrical techniques—what one critic called an "extreme theatricality"—gave it a melodramatic cast (France 2001: 104).

Other characteristics of melodrama include its "overwrought" expression of "raw" and "highly charged" emotions; and its preference for "outrageous coincidence, implausibility, convoluted plotting, deus ex machina resolutions, and episodic strings of action" (Singer 2001: 45). The 1953 MGM film version was viewed by critics as

[53] There is another example to consider that downplays Caesar's tragic courage. The scraggly soothsayer inaugurates David Bradley's 1950 film version (*Julius Caesar* 1950). The seer holds a lantern against utter blackness, moaning as he makes his way towards the camera: "Caesar, Caesar, beware the Ides of March, Caesar, Caesar." The camera zooms in on his face as he yells dramatically, "The Idea of March have come!," which immediately gives way with two loud, jarring chords to the opening credits. The genre seems a mix of horror and melodrama, especially since the second half is christened "The Revenge of Caesar." Bradley passes over Caesar's courage in favor of highlighting his vain and ill-starred effort to lick fate.

melodramatic, partly due to the "overwrought" acting but also because of "outrageous coincidence"—all the blatant warnings of Caesar's death!—and "implausibility" ("Review," *Variety* 1952; Crowther 1953). Characters like the soothsayer or Calpurnia demonstrate a wild, over-the-top powerlessness. Much about *Julius Caesar* is excessive. The language in the play is full of superlatives (e.g., "Most high, most mighty, and most puissant Caesar…"; "Thou art the ruins of the noblest man / That ever lived in the tide of times" [*JC* 3.1.33; 3.1.259-60]), as if over-signifying might cover over a lack that can never be filled, the empty beast with no heart. No one is just good. One is very, very good. One is very, very courageous and powerful. Greatness here is zero-sum.

A comedy skit that aired on the Ed Sullivan show in 1958 called "Rinse the Blood Off My Toga" mocks Caesar's fearless courage. Calpurnia tells the private eye hired to investigate Caesar's murder, "If I told him once, I told him a thousand times: Julie, Don't go! But would he listen to his own wife? Like talking to a wall. I told him, Julie, it's the Ides of March, beware already" ("Rinse the Blood" 1958). Here, Caesar's courage is senseless, like a wall. The extreme moral rightness and fearlessness of melodrama becomes the stuff of comedy. The "outrageous coincidence" of melodrama is a joke.

Of course, the mockery of tragedy is not new to modernity and does not arise with melodrama. Shakespeare himself sent up his *Romeo-and-Juliet* plotline of star-crossed lovers in the "Pyramus and Thisby" staging in *Midsummer Night's Dream*. But the way Shakespeare intended *Julius Caesar* as a tragedy (its full title is *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar*), and how tragedy is appropriated into melodrama, is unique. The energy of *Julius Caesar* originates from the morally ambiguous killing of Caesar by his friend—a person who does not deny this deep friendship. The distance and divergence between the

conspirators in the play is a huge source of power. Melodramatic renderings flatten this out. The energy now exists *between* characters who symbolize different choices rather than *within* the individual, where tragedy locates conflict. As noted above, whereas melodrama affirms moral absolutism and partakes of an unambiguous expressiveness that communicates everything there is to be said with exaggeration and heightened *pathos*, tragedy is valued (and traditionally elevated above melodrama as elite art) for its unwillingness to offer straightforward and clear-cut answers and unqualified judgments. Tragedy suggests what lies beyond human understanding, what cannot be made sense of, what cannot acquire a precise moral value. It emphasizes the hopelessness of our efforts to make complete sense of the world or remake it in our image. Tragedy undoes the distinction between *virtu* and *fortuna*, free will and destiny, between personal volition and external circumstance.[54]

Although *Julius Caesar* was written as tragedy, its 20th century retellings, notably in times of heightened crisis (WWII, the Cold War), situated it in a universe of moral blacks and whites, of highly charged emotions, and implausible coincidence. This is because melodrama best seems to capture the mood of heroic—once fully tragic—courage today. In fact, tragedy—which tends to focus on persons of high peerage and their fall—can only play as melodrama in a democratic context, which is not sympathetic to such "great men" of stature and thus is less moved by their downfall. As Rita Felski puts it, "Nourished by a sacred and hierarchical cosmology, the tragic flame sputters and dies in the inhospitable air of our secular, democratic times" (Felski 2008: 4). The melodrama of Caesar's (once tragic) courage was translated further out of melodrama

[54] This description of tragedy is heavily indebted to Rita Felski's (2008) introduction to *Rethinking Tragedy*.

into comedy with Calpurnia's "it's the Ides of March, beware already"—which reads Caesar as foolish to ignore warnings in a vain, doomed attempt to keep his reputation for courage intact. Sacrificing too much for courage betrays one's stupidity, not one's valor.

Caesar's tragic courage always had elements of moral absolutism, but those elements were accentuated in mid-century productions of *Julius Caesar*. After all, melodramatic courage might often be just an exaggerated derivation of tragic courage: Even the most tragic of dramas can metamorphose into melodrama if played in such a fashion. These re-workings gave Caesar's flashy, masculine, martial greatness less attention, emphasizing instead Brutus's restrained, contemplative dissent. Brutus's is a courage that seeks to endow the universe with fixed meaning (which I will contrast in my final section with a comic courage that represents a step beyond the insistence on meaning). In part because of this, his courage is melodramatic. If Caesar represents "bad" in these melodramatic retellings of *Julius Caesar*, just how exactly does Brutus play "good"?

Brutus's melodramatic courage

How does Brutus's courage compare to Caesar's? Both share a serious, even sad, tenor. As Nietzsche writes: "What is all of Hamlet's melancholy compared to that of Brutus?" (Nietzsche 2003: 94). Hamlet had his comedic moments, but for Brutus, laughter would weaken the mettle of his courage. Melancholy is a mood experienced by main characters in both tragedies and melodramas. Moods are experienced subjectively by characters, whereas genres are non-personal or pre-personal and describe the overall affectsphere of the play. And here I wish to make a finer distinction. Courageous postures not only differ in changed genre contexts (tragedy, melodrama, comedy) but also based

on the mood of the characters who display courage. In comedies, the mood expressed by lead characters tends to be playful (with the exception of Jack Cade in his comedic scenes, discussed below). *Melancholy* and *playful*, then, are terms I use to designate the moods that exist within the three genres under discussion here: tragedy, melodrama, and comedy. (Although, of course, even though genres contour expectations and persist coherently over time, I should emphasize here the blending of genre in Shakespeare. Genre hangs on a Shakespeare play very loosely: His most heartbreaking tragedies have their comedic moments and vice versa.) It is the playful mood, I'll argue below, that presents the most promise for a democratic politics. Following Spinoza, I make the case that, as opposed to negative feelings that typically impede our capacity to act, playfulness and joy produce the capacity for an expanded repertoire of possible actions (Spinoza 1994).

Now I return to comparison of Brutus's and Caesar's courage. Both kinds, insofar as such courage manifests persistence in the face of uncertainty, share an unpolitical, undemocratic tendency toward apodictic modes and bearings, toward a level of resolve without second thoughts. Because our actions always take place in a context of uncertainty, to require a level of courage for those actions *dramatizes*, by heightening, our everyday encounter with a world that is fundamentally in flux and unknowable. "[T]hose we commonly call courageous choose to keep going when confronted with an obstacle or with danger. They are tenacious, committed to acting even when the outcome is uncertain" (Sparks 1997: 92).

Orson Welles emphasized the self-righteous and melodramatic aspects of Brutus's courage. According to Drama Critic Sidney B. Whipple:

> Mr. Welles, the Brutus of this novel presentation, gives us an honest man, an almost saintly man, a man ever fixed in principle and faithful to his conscience. The conspirators surrounding him, even the lean and hungry ones, are made for a time to appear heroic in the light of the honesty that inspires his decision. You are never in doubt as to the purity of a movement that must encompass the assassination of the dictator (Whipple 2014: 442).

Purity, saintliness, conscience, heroism, honesty: these traits cling to the courageous Brutus as he stands firm against the evils of dictatorship. These are the traits of the very, very good hero in melodrama.

But because Brutus challenges Caesar as a fellow senator and not as, say, a slave or a foreigner or an ordinary citizen, he is "with himself at war" (*JC* 1.2.48).[55] We witness the *pathos* of his extreme self-division, internal passions at cross purposes. Brutus belongs to the same community as does Caesar; Caesar is a father figure if not his actual father. Thus, killing Caesar entails overhauling everything that provided Brutus with a sense of selfhood as a Roman. Brutus's internal diversity leads to his melancholy, introspective self-dissection, which he carries to extravagant lengths. "Rinse the Blood Off My Toga" comically captures this division within Brutus. Brutus goes to a private eye to report Caesar's murder. In talking to the detective, he asks, "Are you sure we're alone? … Then who's that standing beside you?" When the detective says, "That's YOU," Brutus replies, "I know, but can I be trusted?" ("Rinse the Blood" 1958). The man who stabs another and then reports the event in hopes of being arrested is a man internally divided.

[55] Brutus is what Michael Walzer calls an "internal critic." The internal critic does not challenge the core values of a regime but rather challenges what they see as violations of those values in practice (Waltzer 1987: 74). The end goal of their critique is to strengthen the regime. Brutus exemplifies a dissident internal critic who challenges Caesar's authority from within the system, as a Roman senator. Through Cassius's encouragement, Brutus arrives at a sense of Caesar's wrongs. It is not Caesar's place in the sun that Brutus resents but rather the demise of the republican regime that his rule would make inevitable—at least that is the way Brutus would tell it.

Brutus acts from a sense of right, expresses serious political grievances, and aspires to a greater level of equality. Brutus becomes a democratic "saint," in Whipple/Welles's characterization, squaring off against evil dictator Caesar in a world-shattering attempt to renew the meaning and stature of the Roman republic. This is the stuff of pure melodrama.

Melancholy moods, tragic time, and the matter of perspective

Consider now the serious mood of Brutus's courage. I examine Brutus's mood by assessing its similarity to Hamlet's—Hamlet being the most famous melancholic in Shakespeare's oeuvre. As noted above, melancholy is a mood experienced by characters in both tragedies and melodramas. Both Hamlet and Brutus see ghosts, symbolic of an abyss of meaning. Seeing ghosts provokes feelings of melancholy in these two characters,[56] which they each can channel into melodramatic courage. Consider Hamlet's ghost. The ghost scares Hamlet out of his wits, prompting Hamlet's search for meaning in

[56] Most Shakespearean characters confronted by ghosts display a profound sense of melancholy that aligns with their courage. In Laurence Olivier's film version of *Richard III* (1955), during the ghost visitation scene, images of Richard's victims are superimposed on a fog in Bosworth Field (the scene of battle) in Richard's dream and their montage is intercut with shots of Richard in bed, suffering. In placing the victims literally on top of the battle, Olivier's imagery directly links the courage of battle with the courage of facing ghosts.

Often courage is martial, probably due to the fact that ghosts are often associated with battle in Shakespeare. For example, in *Cymbeline*, Posthumous's brothers bear "wounds as they died in the wars," say the stage directions. *Hamlet* emphasizes the ghosts's military attire to significant effect: he comes "arm'd," clad "in complete steel [armor]" (*Ham*. 1.4.33), "Armed at all points [details] exactly, cap-a-pie [head to foot]" (*Ham*. 1.2.200) with his officer's baton. In *Richard III*, the ghosts visit before the major battle of the play, on the battlefield. So it is with *Julius Caesar*, wherein Caesar's ghost visits Brutus first in his tent at Sardis and then during the final climactic battle at Philippi.

But Shakespeare also provides us with a critique of this martial courage, and perhaps the clearest connection between ghosts and courage surfaces in *Macbeth*. When Macbeth has second thoughts about murdering King Duncan, his wife advises him to "screw courage to its sticking place," to keep up the requisite level of courage to follow through on their plans. This courage, like the tragic courage of Caesar, entails a specific, warrior-hero manliness. After Macbeth's first outburst at seeing the ghost of Banquo, his wife asks him, "Are you a man?" (*Mac*. 3.4.58). After he bids the ghost depart, he comforts himself with, "I am a man again" (*Mac*. 3.4.113). Mary Beth Rose argues that "Because of the gendered purity of the hero's quest, *Macbeth* provides the most unrelenting scrutiny and scathing critique of aristocratic male heroism in all of English Renaissance literature" (Rose 2002: 3). She notes that Macbeth succeeds more than any other hero in purging himself of any association with the feminine. The play exposes aristocratic male heroism "as criminal violence" (Rose 2002: 25). Vanquishing fears of ghosts is a rite of passage that allows for a reaffirmation of manliness and of the static greatness borne of that fanatical masculinity.

the event: “What may this mean…? Say, why is this? Wherefore? What should we do?” (*Ham*. 1.4.32, 38) Nietzsche compares Hamlet to Dionysian man who has looked into the abyss: “the Dionysian man resembles Hamlet: both have once looked truly into the essence of things, they have *gained knowledge*, and nausea inhibits action” (Nietzsche 1967: 60, emphasis original). The knowledge Hamlet gains in seeing the ghost, paradoxically, is a knowledge of forgone meaning. Hamlet confronts the dark abyss, the fundamentally unknown and inexpressible, and attempts to overcome the absurdity of its meaninglessness. The abyssal refuses meaning in terms already set, defies interpretation in any traditional form.

Hamlet is not the only character who feels abandoned by all sense-making systems after clapping eyes on a ghost. Like Hamlet’s “Say, why is this? wherefore? what should we do?,” Brutus responds to his ghost with: “Art thou any thing? / Art thou some god, some angel, or some devil / That makes my blood cold and my hair to stare?” (*JC* 4.2.329-331). Like Hamlet, Brutus asks question after question in an attempt to secure meaning. These crises redouble their efforts to restore meaning to events, leading Hamlet to vow, conservatively, “The time is out of joint: O cursed spite, / That ever I was born to set it right!” (*Ham*. 1.5.189-190) Again, similar to the moral rightness demanded by ghosts, Hamlet seeks a temporal rightness that would locate events in their proper order, confer on them their proper meaning. Just before seeing the ghost, Brutus lashes out at a man who fails to “know his time.” Both Brutus and Hamlet seek to “set it right”—time, morality, meaning itself. Ghosts give their witnesses the courage to pursue a path of ultimately devastating righteousness that dyes events in moral black and whites, and to

order time in a way that is ultimately impossible. Hamlet and Brutus's courage seeks to endow the universe with fixed meaning.

But *Hamlet*, and tragedy in general, teaches us that the effort to set time aright always fails. *Julius Caesar*, in contrast to *Hamlet*, can be played as melodrama in large part because the ghost *does* set things "right" by killing those who killed. At the heart of this quest after rightness is the quest for an idea of "justice." Justice, as a meaning-making system, endows events with a deep moral valence. As Jacques Derrida notes, to speak about ghosts is to speak "in the name of justice" (Derrida 1994: xviii). F. W. Moorman agrees: "The Shakespearean ghost is at once the embodiment of remorseful presentiment and the instrument of divine justice" (Moorman 1906: 192). Achieving justice requires courage.

But I must make the further distinction between how viewers view tragedy and how the characters like Hamlet within the tragedy view their quest. As Mel Brooks says, "Tragedy is when I cut my finger. Comedy is when you fall into an open sewer and die" (Brooks quoted in McDonald 2012: 78). From whose perspective does one label a play a tragedy? Whose stance towards action does it privilege? Is genre the stance taken towards what is being watched? Or does the suffering of people in a play by itself make it a tragedy? Further, oftentimes to differentiate between the tragic or the melodramatic depends in large part on how the work is played. Brutus's courage seeks to endow the universe with fixed meaning. Brutus pursues what today would qualify as a melodramatic quest for meaning and moral order. Similar to the moral rightness demanded by Hamlet's quest to "set right" a time that is "out of joint,"[57] Brutus too seeks a temporal rightness that would locate events in their proper order, confer on them their proper meaning. Just

[57] 'The time is out of joint: O cursed spite, / That ever I was born to set it right!' (*Ham*. 1.5.189-190).

before seeing a ghost, Brutus lashes out at an intrusive poet who fails to "know his time" (*JC* 4.3.188). *Julius Caesar*, in contrast to *Hamlet*, can be played as melodrama in large part because the ghost *does* set things 'right' by killing those who killed (as Brutus and Cassius die in the end). Hamlet's may be a melodramatic quest (for moral rightness and final order—which is what *he* seeks) but it takes place within the genre of tragedy (of varied solutions and untidy endings—which is what *the audience* sees).

For the characters in the play, ghosts shake up the established order of time only to prompt a greater affirmation of linearity. The knowledge the ghost carries confronts and perhaps confounds the ghost-seer with a history not yet acknowledged, with an unwieldy burden of one's relationship to past deeds, with a weight of ancestral provocations that cry out for redress. This is why many of the ghosts in Shakespeare's plays are father figures or ancestors: Hamlet's father, Brutus's supposed father Caesar, Richard's older cousin Henry VI, Posthumous' father and mother and older brothers. They raise a larger question of one's responsibility to the past in addition to an existential courage of looking into oneself. We never see only ourselves but perforce see the history behind us as well.

This is why Hamlet's courage locates itself in a linear historical horizon; in both *Hamlet* and *Julius Caesar*, the ghost-seer is prompted to restore linearity. The possessors of tragic courage or melodramatic courage (to differentiate between the two genres depends in large part on how the work is played) justify their actions with the moral language of right-versus-wrong, of divine justice and purpose. These kinds of courage strengthen a masculine, aristocratic form of greatness. This greatness is static rather than dynamic as it strives to overcome fear and evil and locate fixed meaning in the universe.

But ghosts, for the viewers of the play, are radical. Derrida uses ghosts as a trope to conceptualize a spectral, untimely history, one that does not assume linearity. For him, the ghost is an event, one that always returns. As Sam Chambers writes, "a conversation with ghosts can never be timely since we never know when they are going to show up, nor if they will even speak when they do appear" (Chambers 2003: 90). Since ghosts can always reappear, it is in vain that we try and arrest their movement and bid them speak to us. We can never be done with history, as its ghosts will return. "The responsibility of an untimely politics consists of the need to remain ever vigilant, given its commitment to the possible (re)appearance of specters" (Chambers 2003: 93). Time is radically broken. The past and future lay claims on us we may have never foreseen.

This spectral history is a radical history. It does not ask for solutions, for tidy endings, for closure, for final or absolute meaning. Rather, it knows solutions on such terms are impossible. As Chambers says, "untimeliness may disturb our most assured convictions; it shakes even the solid ground of ontology by calling into question the very distinction between the actual and the spectral" (Chambers 2003: 3). Ghosts force an inquiry into the difference between the empirical and the nonreal because it is impossible to know the material reality of the ghost. Are ghosts an hallucination of the mind or do they have an independent, full-fledged reality? It is also difficult to extract a meaning from ghosts, as it is impossible to pin fixed meaning on abyssal events. We give certain horrific or strange events meaning, but sometimes our meaning-making systems show signs of wear or come apart upon closer inspection. But the unfailing failed or only partially successful *attempts* at meaning are there. Brutus demands meaning from time and events—questioning the ghost, directing the conspirators to bathe in Caesar's blood

as an improvised ritual gesture. Sacrifice, which was undertaken to launder prior wrongs, to cauterize past impurity and reaffirm the greater good, must establish meaning, otherwise courage has been mustered for a meaningless cause. Having killed Caesar, Brutus's task is to make that deed count by saving the republic through it. Abysses never have meaning in themselves but must have meaning given to them. In the play, Cicero notes the discrepancy between event and interpretation when he says, "men may construe things after their fashion, / Clear from the purpose of the things themselves" (*JC* 1.3.34-35). The appearance of ghosts in Shakespeare's plays prompt a search for meaning in events, an insistence on coherence to an unfolding story, where the effects of events have clearly locatable causes, where there is a *telos* ordered according to principles widely known and understood. That linearity is challenged to the greatest extent in *Hamlet*. Viewers of the play see that Hamlet's effort at linearity fails, because doing the bidding of ghosts never restores order. What seem like "solutions" to Hamlet always results in tragic failure. Efforts to set time or meaning "aright" always fail. This is the lesson of tragedy.

Hamlet, Brutus, and Caesar display courage in a serious, sometimes melancholy, mood, a courage that would affirm an overriding principle of teleological time and meaning. That is because ghosts, themselves of such dubious materiality and cause, ironically tend to prompt a quest to restore linearity: Hamlet says, "if ever I was born to set it right!" Because ghosts represent a linear history (Hamlet's father, Brutus's father, Posthumous's father), the courage demands conservative responsibility. To the ghost-seer, ghosts do not radically disrupt the historical trajectory; rather, they are conservative forces of its perpetuation. Ghosts prompt a restoration of a smooth historical horizon,

because they seek revenge. They are figures of stature and deference. The ghost is a conservative spirit of revenge, to set things "right." It comes to demand a "solution" to its murder. Hamlet is a tragedy from the viewer's perspective, but Hamlet's courage, like Brutus's, is not tragic: its morality and its solutions are too easy and clear. To speak anachronistically, Hamlet and Brutus pursue what today would qualify as a melodramatic quest for meaning and moral order.

Serious courage within a comic genre: the case of Cade

I mentioned above that Shakespeare wears genre loosely. So it is that a character who takes his courage very seriously—Jack Cade, from *II Henry VI*—comes to display courage in a serious mood within a comic scene (all within the context of a play generically classified as a "history," to confuse the matter further). Like Brutus, Cade is a courageous dissident seeking to overthrow the powers that be. Each man stands by what he considers to be right. Further, the universe of both the Roman play and the history play assumes a certain justness of ends, and a linearity to history common in tragedy and melodrama. Although *II Henry VI* ends in uncertainty—York's forces doubt whether they can secure their victory against King Henry's men—there is a Christian assumption of stability to the universe. Eleanor's witchcraft is banished and the peasant rebellion put down. Although the battle for the crown rages among the nobility, no completely unjust usurpers threaten the state of things. The difference between Brutus and Cade hinges on mood (the gallows humor in Cade's rebellion; the seriousness of Brutus's) and the position from which they lay claim to right. A playful or a serious mood can find its place in any genre. We can see once again not only how courage's commitments change with context but also how they change depending on one's mood. (NB: Although one might

argue that "courage" itself might be a mood, I consider it here as more of a character trait. One can be courageous with a cheery disposition or, in the context of rebellion as is the case here with Cade, with the glum mood of the malcontent.)

If Brutus exemplifies dissentious action from within the sphere of political power, embodying delicate, heroic self-division, Cade displays himself as a vulgar, aggressive buffoon. His heroism, when evident, remains vague and undefined. Sometimes Cade speaks powerfully outside the sphere of political power, but his mindless bellicosity—shooting a man dead for addressing him incorrectly—and clownish anti-intellectualism place him in the realm of farce. In Michael Kahn's 1996 adaptation of the *Henry VI* plays, Cade's men look like a band of misguided thugs (*Henry VI* 1996). Cade himself sports a Mohawk, shouts all his orders, and presents a convincing picture of a man as far from introspective self-division as possible. Loud drum-banging and ear-shattering noise accompany Cade's entrances on stage. In sum, Cade exhibits a comic courage in unexpected and horrifying lights. Although Cade is a stooge for the Duke of York, he nonetheless voices his grievances from a position outside the sphere of political power.[58]

Elizabethan culture had strict rules about the genre of dissent, how rebellions would be depicted. There is a class association with genre. The killing of the lower classes were represented in a comic mode: "Peasants are a staple of laughter in Renaissance art"—not of a leveling laughter but rather of a "laughter that attempts to inscribe ineradicable differences" (Greenblatt 1983: 18, 17). Comic violence is funny to Renaissance audiences, and, concomitantly, secures status boundaries (Greenblatt 1983:

58 Of course, Cade is never really outside the sphere of political power altogether. The only characters who exist outside the sphere of power in Shakespeare's plays would be Timon of Athens, who repairs to a cave in the forest to live in solitude (although visitors seek him out there), and Belarius, Guiderius, and Arviragus, who live in a cave in the wilds of Wales. But the latter return to the court of Cymbeline in the end.

19). On the one hand, comedy is the genre in which working class people and servants speak. One might view this as symbolically empowering for the lower classes. But, as Greenblatt argues, "Shakespeare depicts Cade's rebellion as a grotesque and sinister farce, the archetypal lower class revolt both in its motives and in its ludicrousness" (Greenblatt 1983: 23). Shakespeare calls attention to the "comic humbleness of the rebels' social origins" (ibid). Greenblatt calls Cade's followers—the tanner, the butcher, the weaver—"buffoons" (ibid) and judges the lower-class rebels' representation much more harshly than do critics like Annabel Patterson (1989).

It is hard to take Cade and his followers' grievances seriously because of the macabre jokes and vile humor that color the scenes, almost shading at times into a very anti-democratic mode of dark authoritarian comedy (as the genre is framed to the audience). By contrast, the tragic genre in which Brutus is placed—in which the Roman conspirators are careful to play their part in somber tones and not make themselves "common laughters"—ensures his grievances a fairer hearing. The Roman grievances seem weightier than Cade's, essentially because Cade does not articulate them consistently.

Whereas Brutus works within the genre confines of tragedy (or melodrama), Cade is placed (by audiences, by playwright) in the realm of comedy. Although Cade is an object of mockery, however, *he* sees his business as serious and righteous. The difference between being captured in a comedic mode against one's will, as Cade is, and playing to the comedic mode purposefully, as Rosalind does in *As You Like It*, for example, hinges on *mood*. For, like Brutus, Cade has his moral blacks and whites, his good (the "honest

plain-dealing man" [*II Henry VI* 4.2.94])[59] and bad (well-spoken nobles), and he is willing to give his life in the pursuit of justice. Cade does not seek true reform as Brutus does; after all, he knights himself—indicating that he seeks to rule in the fashion of the English kings. But Cade is just as brave. While the nobles in this play would claim a fearless courage to themselves—the haughty Suffolk says, "True nobility is exempt from fear" (*2H6* 4.2.131) and York says fear is for the lowly (*2H6* 3.1.335-6)—Cade (as does the modest property-owner who kills him) proves that fearlessness is not the sole possession of high aristocrats. He affirms even with his dying words—a time in Shakespeare where characters confess all truthfully—that he "never feared any" (*2H6* 4.9.71). Cade asserts himself in a *serious* mood within a comedic genre, whereas characters like Rosalind in *As You Like It*, discussed below, act *playfully* (democratic potential lies in the latter—not in Cade's comic courage).

In fact, Cade's comic courage in a serious mood shares parallels with the attributes of tragic courage. Two scenes from *II Henry VI* recall *Julius Caesar*. The masses under Cade following his orders with a definitive "It shall be done!" (*2H6* 4.7.104) echoes Antony's blind admiration of Caesar: "When Caesar says 'do this,' it is perform'd" (*JC* 1.2.12). Obedience takes the same form in Rome as in Elizabethan England. Second, Cade's bias against the clerk for being able to "write and read" (*2H6* 4.2.77)[60] plays out like the anti-poet wrath against Cinna the poet (confused with Cinna

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[59] References to *II Henry VI* are hereafter abbreviated as *2H6*.

60 We are left to rue the irony in the fact that part of Cade's platform is anti-education, for Cade would benefit from schooling. Cade's story recalls Renaissance humanist Thomas Wilson's (2000) argument that rhetoric buttresses the social order because reason persuades each man to choose peace over courage, to "live in his own vocation" rather than fight for the position of a king. "For what man, I pray you, being better able to maintain himself by valiant courage than by living in base subjection, would not rather look to rule like a Lord then to live like an underling, if by reason he were not persuaded that it behoveth every man to live in his own vocation and not to seek any higher room than whereunto he was at the first appointed?" (Wilson 2000: 176). Reason and eloquence persuades each man to be peaceable. But Cade

the conspirator) from *Julius Caesar*. "Tear him for his bad verses"—what the Romans say of the pathetically innocent Cinna—recalls Cade's "Away with him, I say, hang him with his pen and inkhorn about his neck" (JC 3.3.29; *2H6* 4.2.98-9). Although we laugh at Cade, and the genre is comedic, both sequences border on gross terror.

As the above should demonstrate, both mood and genre dictate whose grievances are considered worthy and whose not.[61] When the nobles in *II Henry VI* voice popular grievances (Gloucester, Salisbury), their mood and the overall mood is serious. When commoners themselves express their discontent, although *their* mood is serious (and we can acknowledge the injustices they voice as serious), their grievances are translated into the stuff of comedy by the genre in which they are placed. Yet there is no substantive difference between the physical courage—courage *in action*—displayed by Cade and that displayed by the nobles in the play. If anything, it brings attention to the greater reserves of courage that unjust situations demand from marginalized citizens like Cade. The comic rebellion scenes in *II Henry VI* allow us to better observe, by seeing the contrast when we place them side-by-side, the serious mood of tragic (or, depending on how it is played, melodramatic) courage in *Julius Caesar*. We see similarly courageous dissidents, and similarly unegalitarian situations, met with two very different men in two very different genres. We see a man (Cade) who views himself very seriously, as does Brutus, but who finds himself judged in a comic light and unable to do anything about it. Brutus holds a similar view of himself as Cade, but is in a better social position and is therefore able to

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chooses courage over rhetoric, the status quo, and peace. Although discredited, Cade exemplifies courage taken to comedic, terrifying extremes.

61 Patterson (1989) calls attention to Shakespeare's use of "ventriloquism" through which the grievances of the peasants are voiced in the play. When Cade voices these concerns, they are "intellectually confused and ideologically unstable" (Patterson 1989: 49). But when the Lord Salisbury becomes the people's spokesman, their concerns receive coherent and logical expression. The fact that the peoples' grievances are articulated via ventriloquists does not undercut the significant fact that they are voiced at all.

depict his rebellion in more meaningful, recognized terms. We are therefore more likely to recognize Brutus as courageous. Courage is more easily distinguished as courage (by an audience, by us) when it is portrayed seriously; when its bearers are committed to "rightness"; and when they assume resolute bearings.

Courage functions differently as the generic context changes: courage can support inherited privilege and hierarchy (Caesar's valiant actions as military chief in tragedy), or it can bolster attempts to secure meaning in the face of everyday contingency (Brutus or Hamlet's melodramatic questing). Courage also has a third generic face: Courage in a comic genre and *playful mood* can, I argue below, challenge the roles and meanings that traditionally anchor subjectivity and order. The most promising kind of courage for democratic life is comic courage executed in a mood of playfulness.

Comic courage in a playful mood

Nietzsche speaks of a "courage [that] wants to laugh" (Nietzsche 2008: 28).[62] When the solemnity of looking into the abyss grows oppressive, some slough it off with

[62] The question of Nietzschean laughter has been a topic of much debate. Nietzsche shared the genre bias of Renaissance artists in favor of tragedy. He expressed contempt for the New Comedy of Euripides, which ushered in the trump of the slave "who has nothing of consequence to answer for, nothing great to strive for, and cannot value anything of the past or future higher than the present" (Nietzsche 1967: 78). Detached from greatness and moored to the present, the comic counts as less profound than the tragic for Nietzsche. Before Euripides, the Greek artist presented a mirror to the Greeks, in which only "grand and bold traits" were reflected. With Attic comedy, that mirror "now showed the painful fidelity that conscientiously reproduces even the botched outlines of nature" (Nietzsche 1967: 77). Whereas before, pain was transmogrified into a glorious heroism of overcoming, now it signifies as human weakness as the tragic world view gives way to the slave's cheerfulness. "This cheerfulness stands opposed to the splendid 'naivete' of the earlier Greeks, which…must be conceived as the blossom of the Apollonian culture springing from a dark abyss, as the victory which the Hellenic will, through its mirroring of beauty, obtains over suffering and the wisdom of suffering" (Nietzsche 1967: 109). This abyss, for Nietzsche, is consciousness of the meaninglessness of existence, of the absence of a god to set things right, the absence of cause and effect, or as Norman Mailer puts it, "the intolerable anxiety that death being causeless, life was causeless as well" (Mailer 1957: I).

Critics have delineated two types of laugher in Nietzsche's work, that of the "height" versus that of the "herd," as John Lippitt terms it (Lippitt 1999). There is a leveling sort of laughter, one that laughs *with*, and then there is one that laughs *at* others in order to inscribe hierarchical and indelible difference. But there is a shift over time in Nietzsche's representation of laughter, which Mark Weeks identifies. Whereas in his early work Nietzsche marginalizes laughter in opposition to the tragic, in *The Gay Science*

laughter. Without imposing on reality a moral system, a reason, or an ideal in relation to it, those with comic courage can face reality without such blinders, overcoming fear and loathing at existence's meaninglessness. Those in possession of comedic courage know

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and *Zarathustra*, he incorporates laughter into his project of heroic striving (Weeks 2004: 10). Laughter becomes a means of education. Zarathustra's laughter, Weeks argues, is futuristic, elevating, and "a driving force of the will" (Weeks 2004: 14). As Nietzsche says in his introduction to *The Birth of Tragedy* in 1886, "you ought to learn to laugh, my young friends, if you are hell-bent on remaining pessimists. Then perhaps, as laughers, you may some day dispatch all metaphysical comforts to the devil—metaphysics in front" (Nietzsche 1967: 26). While "to the devil" a little confusedly presumes the continued existence of a metaphysical system, this laughter, instrumental in overcoming other-worldly metaphysical "comforts," like the "naivete" of the Greeks, springs from "a dark abyss." Overcoming metaphysical comforts requires confronting the dark abyss in order to overcome the absurdity of meaninglessness.

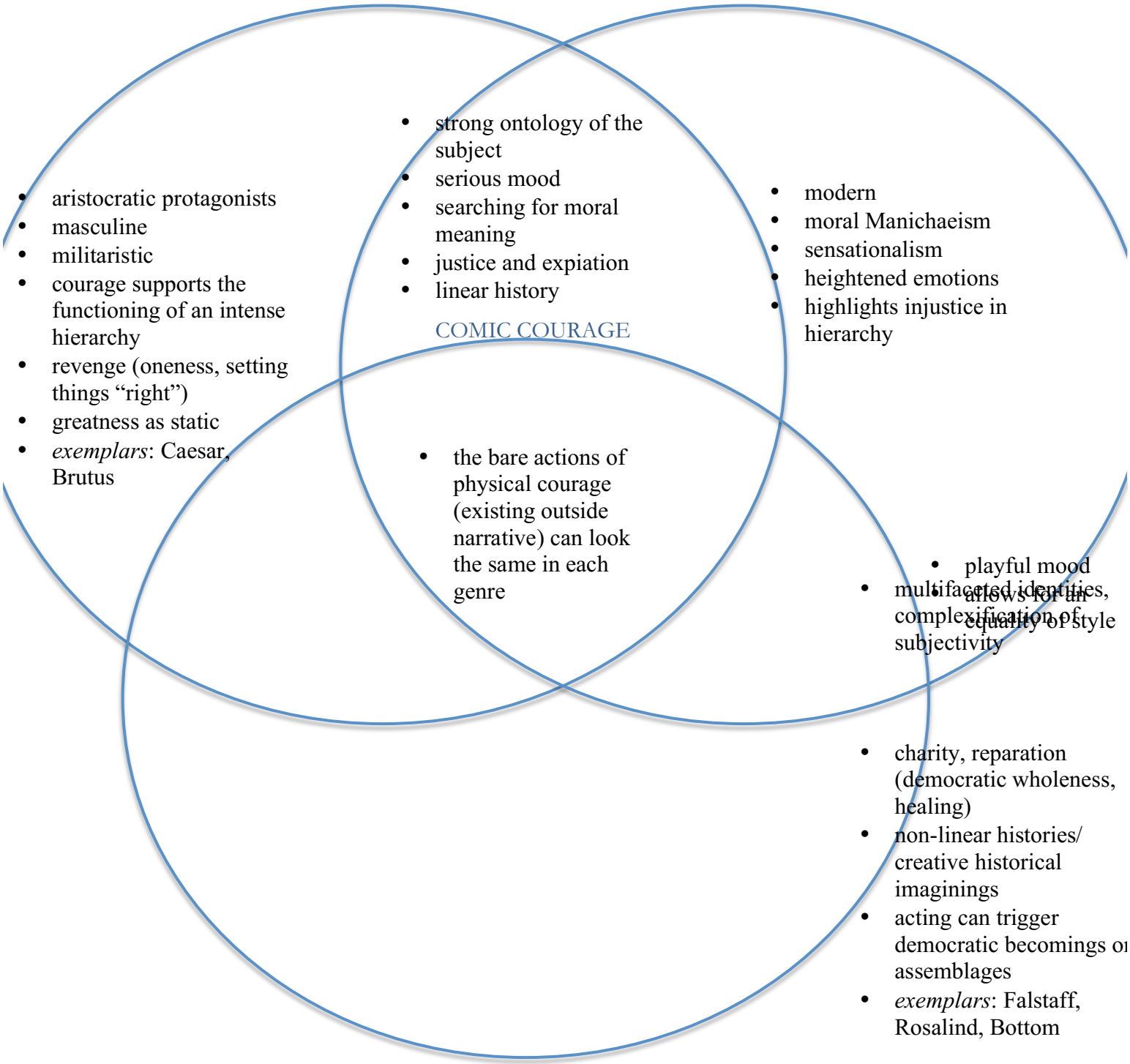
Willing this new kind of laughter overcomes a nausea or absurdity at the abyss of existence when we no longer have the old metaphysical comforts of Christianity or other meaning-systems. As Nietzsche notes in *The Gay Science*, art resembles systems like Christianity in that it allows us to avoid nausea and suicide in the face of the abyss, i.e., the absurdity of existence, but art has the added attraction of being non-moral. "As an aesthetic phenomenon existence is still *bearable* to us, and art furnishes us with the eye and hand and above all the good conscience to be *able* to make such a phenomenon of ourselves" (Nietzsche 2003: 104, emphasis original). Through art, we furnish our existence with meaning. Without either art or metaphysics, without imbuing the abyss of being with a meaning, life seems savagely unfair, filled with all manner of useless suffering and horror. In a similar passage from *The Birth of Tragedy*, he calls art "the saving sorceress" because "She alone knows how to turn these nauseous thoughts about the horror or absurdity of existence into notions with which one can live: these are the *sublime* as the artistic taming of the horrible, and the *comic* as the artistic discharge of the nausea of absurdity" (Nietzsche 1967: 60). Throughout Nietzsche's writings, the comic serves to counterpoint the abyss and suffering. He values this existential, artistic courage that overcomes suffering. One of the last comments Zarathustra makes about courage compares it to looking into the abyss with pride (Nietzsche 2008: 233). For the overman, the higher laughter in the face of the abyss represents this "pride."

A courage that wants to laugh, then, is an existential courage, the courage to look into the abyss and affirm life's joys and sorrows, its ecstasies and horrors. *This is neither a leveling nor a hierarchy-affirming laughter*. It is, rather, a laughter that meets and then overcomes squeamishness at the abyss's edge—making action possible. Coupled together, the sublime and the comic redeem our suffering. These are tools, Nietzsche claims, Socrates did not have, for he failed to find any pleasure in looking into the abyss. He saw only "causes without effects and effects seemingly without causes" (Nietzsche 1967: 86). Taking refuge in metaphysical systems that designate effects and causes and rely on outworn notions of good and evil is not courageous for Nietzsche. To posit God, heaven, or lean on moral meaning is cowardice. But in a climate of mass destruction and war, it is all too easy to seek comfort in traditional solutions to the riddle of existence: in God, or in manifest destiny, some historical, progressive telos. Heidegger tellingly calls this groundless state of being a "lostness" (Heidegger 2008). The courageous solution is to embrace this state.

Comic courage requires the ability to, as Nietzsche writes, "stay cheerful when involved in a gloomy and exceedingly responsible business" (Nietzsche 2003: 31). He seeks to preserve gloom within the joy of being, often preaching what Michael Tanner calls a "laughing seriousness" (Nietzsche 1992: ix). An emancipated spirit "stands in the midst of the universe with a joyful and trusting fatalism, in the faith…that in the totality everything is redeemed and affirmed" (Nietzsche 1992: 114). We cannot separate the good from the bad in order to know for certain what is morally right anymore: Thus, we are bereft of an important prerequisite for heroic (Caesar's) and melancholy (Brutus's) courage. Although Nietzsche does privilege play and the comic in his work sometimes, and despite Derrida's celebrated affirmation of jouissance and "a certain laughter and a certain step of the dance" in his work (Derrida 1991: 76), Nietzsche's laughter is often aristocratic and cruel, and he does not live up to the best version of comic courage that I describe here.

that there is right and there is wrong, but they also know that deciding which is which is not always so easy. I use the following Venn diagram to locate the differences between tragic, melodramatic, and comic courage:

TRAGIC COURAGE MELODRAMATIC COURAGE


aristocratic protagonists
masculine
militaristic
courage supports the functioning of an intense hierarchy
revenge (oneness, setting things "right")
greatness as static
exemplars: Caesar, Brutus
strong ontology of the subject
serious mood
searching for moral meaning
justice and expiation
linear history
COMIC COURAGE
modern
moral Manichaeism
sensationalism
heightened emotions
highlights injustice in hierarchy
the bare actions of physical courage (existing outside narrative) can look the same in each genre
playful mood
allows for an equality of style
multifaceted identities, complexification of subjectivity
charity, reparation (democratic wholeness, healing)
non-linear histories/ creative historical imaginings
acting can trigger democratic becomings or assemblages
exemplars: Falstaff, Rosalind, Bottom

When I think of a comedic courage exemplified in Shakespeare's work, what springs to mind immediately is Rosalind and Celia's response to the prospect of exile in *As You Like It*. Usually, being forced into exile foretold a soul-crushing doom. Of course, the pastoral genre of *AYL* accounts somewhat for the diminished dread. One does not expect power-grabs, coup d'etats, banishment, and backstabbing to have the devastating consequences they carry in a history or tragedy in the bucolic setting of the forest of Ardenne, where *AYL* is laid. But rather than mourn a future fraught with peril, Rosalind and Celia express a childish delight at their fate. Their decision to take the fool Touchstone along bespeaks their knowledge of the lonely and cheerless life of exile, and a desire to have their spirits boasted by a clown. It is Rosalind's courage in shifting the frame that I wish to highlight—a change in perspective that amounts to a change in genre. It is Rosalind's courageous other-directedness that might be useful today, that might help renew the spirit of democracy, to diffuse a sense of empowerment to the greatest possible number of citizens.

First, to be clear: I am not arguing that Shakespeare regards the fantasy world of Ardenne as a blueprint for a viable social or political order. Ardenne is a place where Rosalind and Celia can explore alternative identities, teach others life-lessons, explore all facets of love and friendship without consequence, a place where hierarchies and boundaries dissolve. I withhold any arguments regarding Shakespeare's setting; rather, I seek to emphasize Rosalind's playful courage as a mood and bearing that can be useful for a democracy in the 21st century. Although democracy as I envision it rests on fixed, albeit vague, fundamental principles such as equality and freedom, democracy is also a

system of government that permits and realizes the multivalence of our characters, our changeability, the fluidity of our personalities. As I will show, comic courage in a playful mood can make government by the people a more enjoyable, inclusive endeavor.

Rosalind at first expresses her fear to Celia: "Alas, what danger will it be to us, / Maids as we are, to travel forth so far!" (*AYL* 1.3.102-3). Who knows what danger lurks ahead? The best way, they decide, is to play-act. What first provokes unmitigated fear in Rosalind soon gives way to an excitement in play-acting, deciding on the props involved—"A gallant curtal-axe [sword] upon my thigh, / A boar-spear in my hand…" (*AYL* 1.3.111-112)—the costumes—"poor and mean attire"—the makeup—"with a kind of umber smirch my face"—the character names—"look you call me Ganymede." The artistry of playing pretend mitigates their fear of the unknown. Acting for Rosalind, as it does for the equally brave Innogen in *Cymbeline*, carries the double sense of both acting in battle and acting in a theater. Imagining her disguise, Rosalind says, "We'll have *a swashing and a martial outside*, / As many other mannish cowards have / That do *outface it with their semblances*" (*AYL* 1.3.114-116, my emphasis). Comedic courage is the courage of cowards—but of cowards who have wits enough to *act* brave. Rosalind brandishes sword and boar-spear in order to "outface" the world by the mere appearance of courage. It turns out that the appearance of courage calls for courage of its own. There is a courage in their cheer as they construct their identities, in their excitement in answering the question "What will you be called?," and in following through with their plans. This is the courage of play-acting.

Moreover, that Celia and Rosalind take a clown along with them on their travels demonstrates their desire for power over the affectsphere in which they find themselves

(one which would otherwise be one of deep dismay and gloom). Comic courage includes the ability to change the mood of a scene, to resist being trapped within a certain mood (i.e., the doleful frame of mind that threatens to overtake Rosalind and Celia). If Cade was trapped in a comic generic frame by his class position, or if Hamlet feels himself trapped within a tragic/moralistic frame by his father's request, Rosalind refuses to be similarly trapped. Change of mood can act as a sort of escape clause from the genre itself, if only for a scene or two. This "trapped-ness" is genre-independent: it can happen in any generic frame.

Celia and Rosalind's disguises and good cheer transform their exile into a newfound freedom: "Now go we in content/To liberty and not to banishment." It is a change in perspective that is called for, facing the abyss of banishment with good cheer and humor. We see this from the start of the play: Rosalind's first line is "I show more mirth than I am mistress of" (*AYL* 1.2.2), which shows an outward attempt to change the color of the scene, to inject some brightness into both the scene and her outward self. The danger of their exile should send bolts of fear through the hearts of maids such as themselves. But if they do conceive of the fruits of banishment in these terms—as bitter and hard—they know having a clown along could only improve their mood. Perhaps taking the clown along demonstrates the extent of their impracticality, or a callous disregard for the fool's life; they certainly do not seem prepared for the starvation that awaits, as we are not allowed to forget the dire material constraints they face initially, given the number of times characters say some version of "I faint almost to death" (*AYL* 2.4.58). Celia, Adam, and Orlando here are on the edge of death. But taking the clown

along also shows their aim of making life into a performance on some level.[63] Touchstone the clown is always testing others' wit—as a "touchstone"—but also drawing others into humorous repartee; his humor is a response to a listening to life, a responsiveness ideally suited for play-acting as described in chapter one. The clown's humor, then, perhaps makes Rosalind and Celia's life in the forest into a performance on some level meaningful to them. Making their journey performative is a way to give it meaning, insofar as performing material requires a self-consciousness about that material. Although Rosalind believes in the beneficence of a golden mean between humor and seriousness[64], she says, "I had rather have a fool to make me merry than experience to make me sad" (*AYL* 4.1.24-25). This is why she and Celia take Touchstone along. If she does believe modernity goes for the mean, that it is "modern" to be moderate, Rosalind also believes that happiness is better than wallowing in deep contemplation (more appropriate to the melancholy mood of tragic or melodramatic courage). Rosalind's courage is democratic because she displays an other-directedness that helps her comrades survive their perilous surroundings: She preserves a pleasant, optimistic outlook among her fellows, not dragging them down with her innermost sadness or performing the maxim "misery loves company," showing more mirth than she possesses in order to distribute the affective wealth she manufactures through the art of acting.

My argument is not that Rosalind is the most courageous character in this play, for that honor might go to another maiden-in-disguise, Celia. It is Celia who gives up everything (her father, her fortune, and her position at court—the entire known world),

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[63] In this sense, Touchstone's fate parallels that of King Lear's fool, who follows his master into his own exile.

64 "Those that are in extremity of either are abominable fellows, and betray themselves to every modern censure worse than drunkards" she says definitively, although perhaps she is just provoking the melancholy Jacques to argument (*AYL* 4.1.5-7).

for someone who might not even love her as much; her second line is to her cousin Rosalind: “Herein I see thou lovest me not with the full weigh that I love thee” (*AYL* 1.2.6). After her father banishes Rosalind, Celia reproaches Rosalind again with, “Rosalind, lack’st thou then the love / Which teacheth thee than thou and I am one?” (*AYL* 1.3.90-91). Celia might be the character taking the most risk; her faith in and love of Rosalind is absolute. But what makes Rosalind’s courage more noteworthy for my purposes is her arch resolve, her leadership ability, and her fearless humor.

This comic courage of play-acting is also notable in the actor Bottom of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. When Bottom says to his fellow actors, “We will meet, and there we may rehearse most obscenely and courageously” (*MND* 1.2.87-88), the courage he invokes is of a particular kind. It is a courage to act in a way similar to when Falstaff plays dead on the battlefield to avoid being killed. Because Shakespeare often deploys metaphors of death as the great equalizer, when Falstaff performs as a corpse, he returns us to the idea of acting as an equalizing practice. In faking his death, Falstaff soundly rejects a tragic model of courage by giving life to Caesar’s line “Cowards die many times before their deaths; The valiant never taste of death but once” (*JC* 2.2.32-33). Caesar represents a model of greatness within a tragic universe. Falstaff, instead of subscribing to this traditional brand of courage, reasons, “The better part of valour is discretion, in the which better part [role] I have saved my life” (*I Henry IV* 5.4.117-118). This is a courage to act in the face of death, the courage—if the occasion calls for it, or if that is the role you choose to play—to be a coward.

Even Brutus’s moves after killing Caesar are colored with a playfulness, when his search for meaning turns up empty. First Brutus locates the assassination within the realm

of the religious to give it moral moorings: He conceives of himself and the conspirators as "sacrificers, but not butchers" (*JC* 2.1.166). Sacrifice is but a means to a greater end. "Sacrificers" flags the ritual or religious aspect of the killing, its higher purpose. The death of Caesar will live forever because Romans will keep investing that deed with meaning. Ann Molan suggests that by bathing in Caesar's blood, as Brutus directs the conspirators to do, Brutus creates "a sort of bonding…. [I]t seems that for Brutus so long as there is some ritual gesture, its meaning can be filled in later" (Molan 1984: 91). This postponement of meaning is what I would call playful. The ritual nature of the act itself would give it meaning, would inscribe meaning in the meaningless abyss of Caesar's blood, but has no intrinsic significance. It is the drama, the playacting, that gives it meaning. As Hampton notes, "the murder of the tyrant in the theater of Pompey is revealed by Brutus as the stuff of performance" (Hampton 1990: 227). Cassius says, "How many ages hence / Shall this our lofty scene be acted over, / In states unborn and accents yet unknown!" (*JC* 3.1.112-114). Brutus replies, "How many times shall Caesar bleed in sport [for entertainment]…" (*JC* 3.1.115). In a very self-congratulatory manner, they are locating themselves theatrically, celebrating their acts as a performance just moments later—almost confusing their action and play-action.[65]

In emphasizing acting courageously as a form of courage—this playful element including the ability to approach life *like a play*—I align myself with Arendt's belief that, since motives or intentions or authenticity can never be proven, and political masks can never be removed, best to avoid parsing the difference between the real and the apparent,

65 Theater and sedition were linked in the popular Elizabethan imagination. In both *Julius Caesar* and *II Henry VI,* Shakespeare stages a confusion between real life and play-acting that fevered the minds of his Elizabethan audiences and made them especially sensitive to depictions of rebellion. Once a crowd gathered to see a play, the propertied class feared that conspirators might easily take advantage of the crowd to spread discontent (Roberts 1994).

between being and doing (Arendt 1990). An act can never tell us anything about the intentions of the actor. When we try to search out sincerity, human relations sour. Rosalind's flagrantly fake self-possession, her confidence in approaching the unknown, her devil-may-care posturing: this is courage, because, in the public sphere, as Arendt says, "being and appearance are indeed one and the same" (Arendt 1990: 98). "In politics, more than anywhere else, we have no possibility of distinguishing between being and appearance" (ibid.). In the public sphere, we are judged for what we *do* not for what we *are*. I can be a coward, but I am not judged for being a coward, just as I am not judged for being an American. I am not evaluated based on my identity. It is character made manifest in action, not what I am before I act—that is what I am judged on. Arendt values courageous action as the basis of all politics, and she also values acting itself as courageous. Indeed, for her, as for Aristotle, "the theater is the political art par excellence" (Arendt 1998: 188). Arendt's conception of courage is so close to my own conception of comic courage because of its glib disregard for authenticity. She seems to describe Falstaff perfectly when she writes that a hero "needs no heroic qualities" (Arendt 1998: 186), and that the "original courage" of going out and "disclosing and exposing one's self" in public "is not less great and may even be greater if the 'hero' happens to be a coward" (Arendt 1998: 186-7).

Falstaff's performance as a man who gave his life in battle transvalues courage by mocking it in a courageous refusal to submit to the aristocratic terms of the Henriad. Falstaff knows how to change the frame of the scene (of life) and laugh in the face of death and meaninglessness, celebrating life in all its infinite variety. On the battlefield at Screwsbury fighting the rebel forces, Falstaff offers Prince Harry what he says is his

pistol with, “There’s that will sack a city” (*I Henry IV* 5.3.53). When Harry finds a bottle of sack (dry white wine) instead, he says, “What, is it time to jest and dally now?” (ibid., 54) and leaves, appalled. This line recalls Brutus’s line to Cassius, speaking of the brash poet who inconveniently interrupts their meeting: “I’ll know his humor when he knows his time. / What should the wars do with these jigging fools?” (*JC* 4.2.188-9). Both Brutus and Prince Harry treat wars as solemn occasions to prove one’s honor, a serious manly pursuit. Falstaff does not divide humor and war so. C.L. Barber argues that the prince’s sense of timing “contributes to establishing the prince as a sovereign nature” (Barber 1990: 196). The prince lives in the historical time of mono-tragedy, where greatness is static. One is deemed honorable by one’s performance in battle, and comedy can tarnish one’s reputation. Falstaff, by contrast, possesses what Barber calls “the power of humorous redefinition”—the power to change the mood of the scene, from serious to playful (Barber 1990: 198). Falstaff redefines the terms of battle. This is why he fakes being dead in battle to survive. His is a form of courage that clings to equality in death rather than hierarchy in life. He does not want honor on the terms that the aristocrats set. Falstaff reasons, “Can honour set-to [mend] a leg? No. Or an arm? No. Or take away the grief of a wound?” (*I Henry IV* 5.1.130-132). If the tragic reveres the sacred, the linear, the static, the paternal, the comic by contrast offers us jokes instead of meaning, empowerment among a group (Falstaff and his buddies, or Rosalind, Celia, and the clown, e.g.) instead of solitary privilege (Prince Hal), friends instead of fathers, life instead of meaningless abyss, the emotionally playful instead of the aristocratically dour.

Even Othello has a moment of jocund courage in the face of death that establishes a sense of comradery among Venetian citizens. When confronted with an angry lynch

mob on his wedding night, led by his newly wed bride's father, he calmly jokes, "Keep up [put away] your swords, for the dew will rust 'em" (*Othello* 1.2.60). Similarly, when called before the Venetian duke and senators, after he stakes his life on Desdemona's good word, he then proceeds to make them laugh. William Marshall, a talented character actor, emphasizes Othello's good humor that night in his portrayal (*Othello* 1981). What begins as a confrontation with an angry, hostile, and worried group of nobles, thanks to the *mood* of Othello's speech, ends in jest. In Othello's case, as in Rosalind's, we see a comic courage used by an actor in a playful mood to empower himself and bring himself closer to others (his bride, his comrades). Comic, playful courage creates assemblages of persons and welcoming affects; it brings people together similar to how acting in a play with a cast brings together the ensemble. This is a wholeness rather than a oneness that tragedy or melodrama seeks. Wholeness would allow us to embrace the tension between our individual and collective selves, acknowledging the linked fates of us all (e.g., the Venetian rulers acknowledging Othello's humanity, his likeness to themselves and his role in protecting their welfare; or Touchtone's role in protecting Celia and Rosalind's good mood). Oneness, by contrast, does not imply such multiplicity.[66] Setting things "right," restoring order, establishes a rule of singularity and patrilineage. Comic courage ends in togetherness, wholeness.

Again, to emphasize, Othello wins over the senators not solely with his tale, but with the mood of that tale, with what might be his acting skills (is it possible he takes his life in such urbane stride and fails to fear at all when faced with the angry mob?), with the humor and lightness in his bearing. W. H. Auden has argued that the mood of charity

66 I borrow this distinction from the work of Danielle Allen (2004) and George Shulman (2008). "The effort to make the people 'one' cultivates in the citizenry a desire for homogeneity, for that is the aspiration taught to citizens by the meaning of the word 'one,' itself" (Allen 2004: 17).

is comedic and the mood of justice is solemn and serious (Auden 1968).[67] Certainly this holds true for courage: comic courage is more charitable for bringing various postures and characters together, for sliding between moods, for extending our repertoire of actions.

To get further at the flexibility—a flexibility that opens out onto a vast panorama of gestures, languages, desires—within comic courage, consider again Rosalind. She displays an ability to playfully and courageously take up the actorly challenge of accepting the divers, sometimes potentially conflicting dimensions of one's personhood (loyal subject and daughter of an accused traitor)—that is, to actively embrace the de-centering fissures within subjectivity—in order to empower herself and her friends as more than meek subjects of Duke Frederick. The second line she utters attests to her ability to empathize to the point of self-forgetting: "I will forget the condition of my estate to rejoice in yours," she tells Celia (*AYL* 1.2.12). She then proposes to take up the position of clown and "devise sports" (ibid. 20). To play the fool would by necessity draw out various states, contemplative and amusing: as Jaques will wonder concerning Touchstone: "That fools should be so deep [profoundly]-contemplative" (*AYL* 2.7.31), that they can have such insight and yet be so playful. The strange combinations and admixtures of genre in Shakespeare find their counterpart in the blending of moods. Rosalind and Touchstone's shared empathetic understanding surfaces later as they witness Silvius's lovesickness: "Alas, poor shepherd, searching of thy wound, I have by hard adventure found mine own" (*AYL* 2.4.40); Touchstone immediately follows this with: "And I mine." It is in seeing the other that Rosalind comes to a self-knowledge.

[67] For a contrasting case with a contrasting result, which proves Auden's point all the more, consider Isabella's failure to persuade Angelo to pardon her brother in *Measure for Measure.* Isabelle dooms her cause due to her grave demeanor, which sets a tone of justice rather than charity.

But, like the fool, this self-understanding does not lead to plaintive brooding; comic courage is not about the gloomy oppression of pain or ghosts or self-examination but rather is about rupture, change, shifts. Both Rosalind and Touchstone are adept at mood-switching; because of this, they do not find themselves trapped in a genre (in their case, they might find themselves trapped in tragedy) as does Cade.

The evil Duke describes Rosalind, after her banishes her, as "too subtle…and her smoothness, / Her very silence, and her patience / Speak to the people" (*AYL* 1.3.71-73). Paradoxically, when her silence speaks, she moves the people. In another paradoxical sense, Rosalind, the daughter of the banished duke, enters the public sphere the moment she is exiled. In recognizing her as a proper political subject (which she was not, of course, being a woman), but in recognizing her as a political subject in the sense that she is a person capable of treason against the ruler, the Duke marks her entrance into the public sphere (before she was only his niece, a familial relationship) even as he immediately attempts to distance her from it through exile. Tellingly, the Duke does not recognize speech, anything resembling an Aristotelian *logos*, coming from her mouth. Silence cannot be heard as logical argument. Silence does not invite engagement in rational deliberation among political subjects. Even as it disqualifies her from political debate, it highlights her prominent role in it.[68] When she marks her status as a political subject of the Duke, after he accuses her of treason, she does so oddly, saying: "If with myself I hold intelligence, / Or have acquaintance with mine own desires," then I haven't offended you (*AYL* 1.3.41-42). Although she says this to protest her innocence, she raises

[68] See Ranciere 1999: 36. The fracture within identity that Ranciere prizes as "politics" happens due to a presupposition of equality. Equality allows subjects traditionally viewed as without *logos* to "measure the gap" between "their condition as animals endowed with a voice and the violent encounter with the equality of the *logos*" (Ranciere 1999: 37). Rosalind, paradoxically with her silence, challenges the Duke's treachery, making him aware of her status as an "animal endowed with a voice."

the question of self-knowledge. Do we communicate our own desires to ourselves in a transparent way? Could Rosalind be a traitor and not know it? This issue is never taken up; the Duke assumes the answer is "yes" to the first question and "no" to the second, and these lines may have added some comic relief to a sad scene, but all the better for my point. Rosalind remains courageous and steadfast in forwarding her emotionally compelling case in the face of the Duke's decree, but she does not do so without a playful flexibility of character, without a self-questioning that today might serve a democratic repertoire. This is her battleground, as here she registers the difference between the aristocratic, paranoid assumptions of a man in power and the innocence of her own quiet subjectivity; between the fragile self-as-subject, loyal to her uncle, and the strong self-as-daughter, loyal to her father—this is a political subject's (public) war waged on the grounds of a private chamber within the duke's castle.

Just as Rosalind seeks to keep the tension alive between subjectivities, it is her comic courage in playfully performing the multiple aspects of her subjectivity that causes her to undertake a further disguise: as she tells Celia regarding Orlando, "I will speak to him like a saucy lackey, and under that habit play the knave with him" (*AYL* 3.2.270). Just as she does not evade the double-bodied nature of her subjectivity (i.e., the fact that she is both niece *and* political subject to the duke), she embraces new identities—not to dialectically resolve them, but rather to keep them in play. This is what acting teaches one: to get in touch with the various aspects of one's identity, the various shades of personality. It is due to her special vantage on subjects' changeableness, and her understanding that we all play different roles, that there are multiple subjects within one, that she can cheer herself up: just because a person is unhappy today does not mean they

cannot be happy tomorrow. To embrace more than one identity is the main part of adopting the comic courage of play-acting and mood-switching. Acknowledging the multifaceted shades of our identities is also requisite of democratic actors today.

In banishing Rosalind so heartlessly, the Duke fails to acknowledge his twin roles as both uncle and ruler. His motives are purely political, not grounded in natural family ties. Denying the different dimensions of one's identity—claiming the political over the familial, or vice versa—exacts a heavy cost. The consequences of such a denial are especially prominent in Shakespeare history plays that chronicle the War of the Roses, where families are divided in having to choose which familial relationships to privilege. For it is between separate poles of being—uncle/ruler, daughter/subject, political/private, etc—that agency hangs suspended. Our world consists of relationships: the relatively of worlds between the Duke Senior's reign and Duke Frederick's; relatively of point of views between characters; relationships between daughter, father, cousin and uncle, between duke and subject—and relationships within a subject, the fracture lines or fissures within identity that open up new spaces for agency. These incongruencies of worlds manifest themselves in the burdens and joys of living in exile, making a new world in relation to the old, starting anew in an improvised space. Rosalind plays pretend and in the process, if only fleetingly, shakes up the order of things. Only the possessor of comic courage—with her multiple perspectives on self and society, with her blatant exposure and acceptance of the fissures of identity—can *actively* embrace potentially tragic events playfully.

Rosalind is exemplary of the ability to change the mood of the scene. She both *acts* and *directs*. Just as Rosalind tells Celia how the two will dress for their foray into the

forest, she is both actor and director vis-à-vis Orlando. She makes Orlando act a part he already is: a lover to Rosalind. "Come," she tells him, "woo me, woo me" (*AYL* 4.1.59). She goes on to critique him, to undergo a fake marriage ceremony with him, and to kid him. She is perhaps the most talented manipulator of mood in all of Shakespeare.

The Shakespearean characters with comic courage, while not democratic, set as they are against a background of aristocratic absolutism, nonetheless trigger nascent democratic assemblages in these communities. The democratic can open out to encompass the whole, distinct and varied bodies and affects and disguises—facilitated by a playful mood. Othello putting the nobles at ease with his good cheer, acting like a happy bridegroom; Rosalind disguising herself and bringing a clown; Falstaff making his own, anti-aristocratic untimeliness and playing dead. In each of these situations, characters adopt ways of being at odds with their normal ways of being, sometimes at odds with their noble or otherwise privileged selves. They bring comedy to weighty situations, possessing "the power of redefinition" (Barber 1990: 198). They courageously resist authority, a resistance that stems from breaking free from any one identity category. They are actorly. As Barber notes of Falstaff, "It is the essence of his character, and his role, in *Part One*, that he never comes to rest where we can see him for what he 'is.' He is always in motion, always adopting postures, assuming characters" (ibid.). Rosalind and Othello perform a multiplicity within subjectivity itself: Othello, a warrior hero useful to Venice, seeks to be also a romantic lover; Rosalind, a cast-out maid in tragic exile, seeks to be also a swashbuckling man. All these characters not only defy their context, but they change what could easily be tragic scenes into comedic ones.

Comic courage today

What is the contemporary purchase of comic courage? Can we find any more recent, democratic characters who model the same reaction to exile as Rosalind's in *As You Like It*? I now turn to examine comic courage on the part of women and men in recent film. Similar to Rosalind retreat into play-acting, Madelyn (Marcia Gay Harden) in *If I Were You* (2012) plays the title role in *King Lear* as a way to recover from learning of her husband's affair. In despair—"I'll die alone," she says—she turns to acting. Acting permits her to vent her emotions, and playing the male lead becomes a form of compensation for the powerlessness and hurt she feels over her husband's cheating. As it is for Rosalind, acting is a way to take back control in a situation meant to deprive one of it. Her comic courage extends her possible repertoire of actions, allows her to slide between moods and go beyond a fixed sense of the occasion. She becomes best friends with her husband's mistress, creating camaraderie where there may have been rivalrous enmity. Madelyn changes the mood.

Even more courageous than Madelyn (who does not play Lear in drag), however, is Victor/Victoria Grant (Julie Andrews) in *Victor/Victoria* (1982). Before deciding to don drag, Victoria laments the cramping limitations of womanhood in the song "If I Were A Man." She catalogues the dreams she could fulfil, the adventurous longings she could satisfy: "I'd explore ev'ry far off land, / And I would learn how to fly!" Dressing up as another sex, however, does not often involve escapism for these women. For Rosalind and for Victoria, it is necessary for survival. For Victoria too, career ambition provides another motivating factor.

If women who dress as men might seek a measure of control not allowed them as women, when men dress as women in comedies, it is usually to escape some immanent

peril, as in *Some Like It Hot* (1959) or *Just One Of The Girls* (1993). There is always a courageous component to drag, even when it does not readily appear so. Men who dress in drag in *Some Like It Hot* and *Just One Of The Girls* seek to evade bullies or mafia dons. As if to compensate for the effeminization of not confronting the danger, to prove manliness, the men usually fall in love and find their disguise allows them to establish a position of trust with their love interest. Although there seems to be a considerable element of danger for a woman to become a man, given their physical weakness vis-à-vis men, what is often overlooked is the danger to men under similar circumstances.

In *Just One Of The Girls*, Chris Calder (Corey Haim) turns to drag to escape bullies. His father advocates the knee-jerk masculinist approach: "The best way to get rid of a bully is to stand up and fight him. Even if you lose, he'll respect you and leave you alone."[69] His father even teaches him some boxing moves. When his father learns that his son has pursued an alternative strategy (drag), he says to him, "my son is a coward." But cowardice is not so easily pitted against the courage of bullies. The film shows (in slow-motion detail) Chris's advance up the stairway as he brushes past his tormentors for the first time in drag. The courage called for in this performance should not be underestimated. It is a courage different in kind if not in degree from the courage of manly battle. At the end of the film, Chris must defy his father and dress in drag once more and confess his disguise before the school in order to stay in his prestigious music program. His musical ambitions trump his father's warning to refrain from cross-dressing. Perhaps it is not mere coincidence that the films mentioned in this section involve actors or performers. The element of play in comic courage is important. Comic

[69] The rather masculine female gym instructor advises a similar tack: "You put a lot of energy into hiding from your battles. Why don't you put some into facing them?" This is a similar misrecognition of comic courage as different from "hiding." Dressing as a girl takes a courage of its own. Acting is a battle.

courage is the courage of cowards who *act* brave. To pretend is courageous, especially when you seek to conceal an inward cowardice.

Perhaps no story exemplifies what can be the ultimate futility of comic courage and proves its status as courage proper more than *Life Is Beautiful* (1997). I have no desire to rank order the varieties of courage (my argument is not that comic courage is more or less courageous than tragic or melodramatic courage); but to act with comic courage in the face of immeasurable tragedy certainly requires something rare, something akin to an implacable inner strength. The ability of Guido Orefice (Roberto Benigni), the lead character in this film, to improvise an elaborate fiction in a Nazi concentration camp, to fabricate a fantasy world in the midst of very real terror, to fight the mood of fascism with Chaplinesque humor, all for the benefit of his son, would certainly qualify as that something rare. Guido, a buffoon like Falstaff, is "always in motion, always adopting postures, assuming characters," clowning about (Barber 1990: 198). Guido does such a convincing job in hiding the facts of their imprisonment from his son, that despite the suffering and sickness surrounding them at the camp, his son believes it is all a game. In acting courageously, despite whatever inner fear he may have, Guido recovers humor and hope from a tragic situation. His nimble wit, colorful dynamism, and flexibility of character perhaps mask profound inner distress. I say this film demonstrates the final futility of comic courage because Guido's imagination and comic courage do not save him in the end. But his brand of courage certainly has a place of value in certain situations. Tragic, masculinist courage is not outmoded—we certainly need serious models of courageous behavior to fight terrorists, just as we needed it to fight Nazis. But

fighting for the more inclusive, better world that democracy offers, where everyone's voice counts, sometimes calls for a variety of tools.

Conclusion: comic playfulness and democratic possibility

Being a victim to the genre in which you find yourself, imposed on you from above, as the comic genre was upon Cade, is inimical to the democratic temperament, which deploys playfulness as a means of freedom. Caught in tragic scenes, for example, the ability to laugh at the situation is salutary. As Nietzsche writes about the invention of laughter in *The Will To Power*: "in order to endure this type of extreme pessimism...I had to invent a counterpart for myself. Perhaps I know best why man alone laughs: he alone suffers so deeply that he *had* to invent laughter" (Nietzsche 1968: 56). Rosalind, Falstaff, and Guido: whether in low comedy, high tragedy, or middle history, they can be *playful*. Taking oneself and the situation too seriously would mean giving into the imposed genre, passively accepting the context one has been dealt, hanging up one's *virtu* in the face of *fortuna*. In the way of the actor who can shed and adopt various roles with courage and aplomb, being playful allows one to act. As noted above, how characters see themselves and their world and how audiences see them often diverge, and audiences have prerogatives that scripted characters do not. But democratic actors today, as audience to Shakespeare's plays, can learn from his characters. If ghost-seeing is a paralyzing moment of looking into the abyss, enough to "unman" even the bravest of our aristocratic male heroes, comic courage bespeaks a celebratory moment of change and prospectiveness, a turning towards the future.

Comic courage today might also entail what social theorists like George Lakoff call changing the rhetorical frame (Lakoff 2004). (Of course, I have been calling for more

than a change in speech only, since I have offered as exemplars comic characters who *act* differently as well as speak differently; but speech and action work in tandem, naturally.) For example, using the term "exploring for energy" rather than "drilling for oil," "tax relief" rather than "tax responsibilities." A person with comic courage might rip the veil off euphemisms that disguise inequality or injustice. Rather than positing one frame as "correct," one plays with various frames to show the shifting surface languages that attempt to describe reality. As opposed to tragic and melodramatic courage, which is about justice and setting things "right," comic courage experiments with various frames and realities. One stands not on principle or right—only on experiment and adventure. One's convictions change as the circumstances change. If tragic courage is about the devastating reality of seeing your own complicity in evil, then comic courage denotes what happens afterwards. We act out roles, trigger new assemblages of meaning, of character, of political events, of ethics, playfully, forming new groups of friends, clusters of affects, taking different shapes, become something new, like a pile of old costumes discarded in a backstage trunk, accomplices, co-creators, sometimes in the face of death, sometimes in the interest of an amorphous concept called democracy.

Moreover, perhaps the courage displayed in the comic genre, most often cast within a playful mood, allows us to go even further, beyond subjective moods and interpersonal affectspheres, to dramatize democracy itself, to reckon with its many guises. There is no one, universally agreed-upon definition of all that democracy can encompass, and rightly so. Being playful about politics is not a luxury: it becomes an imperative when the alternative is opting out or giving in to anger or resentment, getting sour about gridlock and partisanship or nurturing nostalgia for the good old days. It is not

humor that prevents things from being done; on the contrary, a spontaneous comic playfulness can grease the wheels of change. Beyond being completely right or completely wrong in the moralistic way of melodramatic courage, with only a moderate certainty and a generous modesty, comic courage can infuse the political process with a rich vitality, can keep politics from becoming too zero-sum, and can condition our thought and ways of being with a flexibility worthy of the highest caliber of democratic citizen. Melodrama does not give our politics the dynamism a healthy democratic polity requires; we cannot judge with a complex and subtle discrimination between candidates for office, for example, as melodrama remains more likely to present one-dimensional characters personifying good or evil (as in Welles' production of *Julius Caesar* where Brutus = good, Caesar = bad). If a tragic frame, with its meaning-making, its rigid linearity, hierarchy and order, can direct or orient us in disciplinary ways, towards unquestioned social ideals, in the world of comic playfulness, we can be skeptics but not melancholic ones. The best place to be is moving, acting, where all manner of activity unfolds prismatically, not with the grand scope of the tragic but in pursuit of the domestic, the local, the minor. Hold unquestioned dogmas to scrutiny, reshape and widen the terms of political debate, develop new tools for analysis—to do these things at all requires courage, but to do them in a playful manner adds immeasurably not only to the quality of our democratic life, but to the quality of the characters within it.

Dissatisfied With The Now: Optimism And Equality Amid Villains

"We are disoriented by the literal loss of trajectory following the collapse of historical metanarratives in a present that appears fraught with injustice and misery and not only apocalyptic danger. It has become commonplace to describe our time as pounded by undemocratic historical forces yet lacking a *forward* movement. This makes the weight of the present very heavy: all mass, no velocity."
—Wendy Brown, "Untimeliness and Punctuality: Critical Theory in Dark Times"[70]

"The weight of this sad time we must obey, / Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say."
—*King Lear*[71]

Introduction: Richard versus Lear

At the opening of *Richard III*, the star player complains that "discontent" has turned to gregarious revelry, and that he is never in the mood for such frivolity. Peaceful time-wasting distends ordinary time in ways that make it a bore for our eponymous hero, who thrills to the rhythms of his own fantasies of crown-capture through intrigue and battle. "Now is the winter of discontent / Made glorious summer," he moans, maybe rolls his eyes (*Richard III* 1.1.1-2).[72] We start with this "now" as he constitutes us, the audience, as his accomplices, sharing his plot to undo the trust between his brothers to ease his way to kinghood. This plotting quickens his pulse so much he must steady himself: "But yet I run before my horse to market" (*R3* 1.1.160). His optimism is a force that energizes the present, that keeps the present open to change and newness.

King Lear is another play that starts in a peaceful yet heightened mood of expectation, and, early on, builds climactically into high-stakes crisis in an airless and desolate atmosphere. King Lear attempts to fix the future in this "now," giving away his kingdom "that future strife / May be prevented now" (*Lr*. 1.1.42-3). To his oldest daughter Goneril, he says, "To thine and Albany's issue / Be this perpetual" (*Lr*. 1.1.64-65); "To thee and thine hereditary ever / Remain this ample third," he says to his middle

[70] Brown 2005: 10, original emphasis.
[71] 5.3.342-3.
[72] References to *Richard III* are hereafter abbreviated as *R3.*

child Regan (*Lr*. 1.1.78-79). He mistakenly envisions his authority holding force after his reign ends and his lineage extending into eternity. He lacks the temporal control he would like to possess, as the "now" quickly slips away from him. Compounding the problem, he lacks Richard's optimism.

Another salient difference between these two is that Richard would appear to be a villain and Lear would appear to be a hero. This chapter stands up for villains as optimistic killjoys whose proto-democratic energies drive them forward to challenge the unfairness they see around them. My first chapter considered theatrical acting as a performative model for political action, my second chapter examined comic courage as a character trait within a democratic sensibility, and now this chapter explores optimism as a mood, in light of the current heightened academic interest in affect and the emotions. The characters highlighted in this chapter generate moods at odds with the prevailing ambience of the play, prevailing moods of complacency and normative languor. Richard in *Richard III* and the villains in *King Lear* advance towards—without ever fully achieving or sustaining—a revolutionary mood that is both sensitive to forms of social oppression that estrange them from the present and that bind them to a future fantasy of the good life of equality and respect, with their previous subjugators punished. As both *Richard III* and *King Lear* are tragedies, this mood is what I will call a "tragic optimism."[73]

I consider this chapter complementary to empirical studies of optimism over the past ten years. Optimism makes people happier, lengthens their lives, and lowers their cortisol levels. Optimists feel more satisfied in their jobs (studies cited in Cassity). Over

[73] I am referring to the quarto title page, as the First Folio classifies *Richard III* with Shakespeare's history plays. In this I follow Jean E. Howard and Phyllis Rackin who note, "In Shakespeare's time, the story of Richard III was repeatedly identified as tragic" (Howard and Rackin 1997: 100).

80 studies find optimism to greatly improve physical health (Holloway 2016). Optimism leads to better psychological well-being as well, reduces hypertension and cardiovascular disease, and allows one to better cope with stress (Mayo Clinic Staff 2016). Optimism is also the most significant predictor of resilience, people's ability to recover from adverse situations (studies cited in Smith 2013). Indeed, researchers credit the mutual care and optimism of the group of prisoners in the "Hanoi Hilton" prisoner-of-war camp in North Vietnam with the low rates of PTSD that developed among the American servicemen released (4 percent, compared to PTSD rates of 85 percent by Americans held in Japanese camps during World War II; Morris 2015: 49).

Different but related to recent theoretical accounts of optimism as a structural force or relation that helps maintain hierarchies of domination and rigidified patterns of social injustice (Berlant 2011; Ahmed 2010), I look at optimism as a mood that can be fostered by a set of practices that might also affect that social order, one's (affective) relationship to that order. I credit optimism as a good tool to have in one's armory against anti-democratic forces, a much-needed mood that can foster better democrats. One might wonder that I am holding up a king (Richard) and other aristocrats (the villains in *King Lear*) as exemplary of a democratic mood. But I emphasize that these characters are *villains first*, villains dissatisfied with a structural order that fails to recognize their fundamental worthiness as human beings, their fundamental equality, and aristocrats or *kings second*. They are outsiders who follow a set of theatricalized techniques to generate appropriate moods for the occasion. For example, Richard's talents as a showman are obvious, especially as Richard describes himself with the same language used to describe actors (*III Henry VI* 3.2.182-93). In occupying the marginal space on the stage called the

platea, shared by "clowns, outsiders, or deceptive villains," Richard III and Edmund perhaps also shade between all three figures (Gurr 2012: 12). Authority figures like kings and fathers stand center stage while comedians and villains occupy the margins. Shakespeare's villains demonstrate the uses of optimism to challenge inequality.

As this dissertation is concerned with bringing to attention the ways in which Shakespeare's theater gives us access to experiences that could allow us to imagine democratic practices or techniques of the self, I should make clear the element of democracy that I most wish to draw out, as democracy is a constellation of (contested) concepts. The main concept, the primary value within the multivalent "democracy," to which I give priority is equality.

Richard III and *King Lear* give us initial settings that constrain the play's villains within inegalitarian institutions and social structures. The villains are ignored, demonized, or at least demoralized before they have a chance to thrive within the normative institutions (rigidly hierarchical) and settings (peacetime) and moods (amusement) they come to hate. The existing order does not recognize them as fully human—Richard for his deformity; Edmund for his illegitimacy. True, these villains desire to rank above others, never dislodging the hierarchical ideal in place in monarchy. They are aristocrats at the top of an aristocratic order—Richard even eventually ascends to the top of that order by becoming king. It may seem as if they have an enormous power and freedom that the majority of Americans lack. I would argue, however, that the structural constraints that hem them in, the injurious attachments cemented through their dreams of being recognized by their fellow men, the sustaining relations that seem so cruel and unjust to them, the system that keeps them in a position of inferiority, the

conditions of life that might just as easily wear them out, similarly place them in a situation akin in degree if not in kind with the limited options for upward mobility available to a majority of Americans. I argue that their optimistic mood helps them achieve the mobility they so ardently desire and will do anything to attain. They are initially motivated by the lack of being afforded basic rights of equal consideration with others they consider their equals. What motivates them is their unique brand of optimism. This is not the optimism of the naif, the cockeyed, impractical sort. It is an optimism borne of the terrors of struggle for right. I am not advocating villainy as an appropriate route to higher social status, but I do think that, for one, villainy is a matter of perspective, and two, there is something to learn from Shakespeare's optimistic villains.

Recent critiques of optimism expose the trap of pinning one's hopes on a future time that may never materialize, or, if it does materialize, is bound to be disappointing. It is hard to actualize our desires, as all objects of our desire are just "rest stops amid the process of remaining unsatisfied" (Berlant 2011: 42). This chapter addresses those critiques before answering them with close analyses of the moods displayed and put into circulation by Richard III, Edmund, Goneril and Regan (in Shakespeare's plays and in American adaptions)—all morally unredeemable villains who, I argue, nonetheless show us what a tragic optimism has to offer, one unattached to a moralism. I now first examine optimism as it is conceived by Lauren Berlant (2011), Sara Ahmed (2010), and Joshua Dienstag (2006). Then I will respond to these scholars critically in order to defend optimism. In doing so, I turn to Shakespeare's optimistic villains to demonstrate the motivational force of optimism, these villains' challenges to the normative, their

alternative paths forward, their vibrant imaginations and theatricality, their refusal to be oppressed, and their ability to thrive in a world of upheaval and change.

Literature Review: Recent Critiques of Optimism

One might object that Berlant's work *Cruel Optimism* addresses specifically late capitalist societies amid a crisis-ridden neoliberal transition. Berlant's argument is pitched so firmly in the present scenario of global capitalism and the neoliberal restructuring of the US and Western Europe over the last 30 years that it may seem foolish to answer its claims with Shakespearean characters anchored in an alien historical space. Her diagnosis of our present seems so hopeless in part because of capitalism's "refusal of futurity" (Berlant 2011: 189)—similar to Brown's insight into the loss of forward movement in my epigraph. Capitalism in the present is a place of risk, threat, and ongoing anxiety (Berlant 2011: 203).

But insofar as all optimism must exist alongside "the structural cruelty of risk, exposure," misrecognition, lack of reciprocity, and contingency, Berlant's is not only an historical but also an existential problem (Berlant 2011: 267). Capitalism accentuates these problems, mobilizes them in unparalleled ways, but *Richard III* and *King Lear* are also places of enormous instability. Some 20th century American versions of these plays have emphasized that—like the 2012 Brooklyn Academy of Music production of *Richard III* that used a raked stage, a stage set at an angle, putting every actor in a place of imbalance, thrust forward or sideways, so that Richard, in his warped posture, is the only actor onstage in balance. Additionally, Jane Smiley's retelling of *King Lear* set on an Iowan farm in the 1980s reveals a forward-looking attachment to the capitalist dream of more land and its devastating effects. In reclaiming these stories for America, these

authors and producers allow us to consider Shakespeare alongside critiques of optimism situated at our present historical juncture.

Further, Marxist and humanist Shakespeare scholars view *Lear* as poised in the historical transition between feudalism and capitalism (Aers and Kress 1981; Turner 1988). What Victor Kiernan describes as "the tormented process of social change, the whirlpool at the conflux of two eras, and the impossibility of any smooth, easy progression from one to another" might just as well describe the transition Berlant describes between a post-WWII liberalism and the neoliberalism of today (Kiernan 1996: 108). Walter Cohen, in his reading of the play, even goes so far as to suggest that we can catch sight of sentiments eventually to be shared by the Levellers and Diggers, proto-democratic social movements for equality (Cohen 1985). Annabel Patterson (1989) finds evidence of Shakespeare's egalitarian leanings.[74] Although I will not weigh in on this question, my point is that our post-Fordist moment should not be taken as incomparable.

Now I will review Berlant's critique in order to better grasp the problem with optimism as seen by contemporary theorists. Her book *Cruel Optimism* considers how optimism manifests in attachments, the structural relationship between objects and the subjects who desire them. This she separates from the feelings of optimism itself. Optimism can feel like anxiety, hunger, fear, cheerfulness, anger, etc (Berlant 2011: 81). And indeed it does for Shakespeare's villains, who envision objects that would make life better: being equal to one's brother or winning his land (Edmund); securing the crown (Richard, the Macbeths, Cladius); a life of beauty (Iago); a pound of flesh (Skylock);

74 (Of course, it is also possible to place *Lear* on the side of the feudal status quo.) I am indebted to Kiernan Ryan's enlightening conspectus of the critical literature on *Lear* between 1980 and 2000 (Ryan 2002).

having one's honor and one's eldest son (Tamora). Although it can feel like anything, optimistic attachment makes life bearable.

Such optimism is cruel when the object of desire threatens subjects' well-being. The desire for the object gives the subject a purpose to life. People become so tethered to certain objects that "object loss entails loss of world" (Berlant 2011: 16)—consider Richard's last plea, "My kingdom for a horse!" (*R3* 5.7.13) (This may be read as a heartsick statement that he's lost his kingdom for want of a horse to fight on, but it can also mean, if he is so at the height of his despair that he'll say anything, that he will give you his kingdom for a horse—*that's* how much I want to fight. Then the horse becomes the ultimate object of attachment.) Fantasy becomes a "life-sustaining defense against the attritions of ordinary violent history" (Berlant 2011: 45). Berlant does not counsel relinquishing our fantasies of the political altogether—this will not solve the problem—because we need fantasy "to motor programs of action, to distort the present on behalf of what the present can become" (Berlant 2011: 263). She recommends fantasies of "politically affective immediacy"—feeling communal, "a more sustainable optimism through absorption in the present process" (Berlant 2011: 262). We can produce images of the good life that do not hinge on unreal images of the sovereign subject. This is one of Berlant's main critiques: that optimistic attachment to modes of liberal normativity (i.e., conventional desires, for things like the nuclear family, fame, work, wealth) fuels the fantasy of sovereignty, the sense that one can achieve because one can desire, a sentiment encapsulated in the feel-good bromide, "if you can dream it, you can do it." This view of sovereignty wrongly conflates desire, intention, decision and action (Berlant 2011: 97).

Instead of the sovereign subject model, Berlant suggests an alternative of "agency without intention" (Berlant 2011: 18) attentive to "the hesitancy and recessiveness in ordinary being" (Berlant 2011: 124). We take "small vacations from the will itself" (Berlant 2011: 116). Neoliberalism's labor demands and the pressures of reproducing ordinary life—and the outlet fantasies that blossom into optimistic attachments—exert itself especially on subjects who believe themselves sovereign. Sovereignty and the object one desires are locked in an inextricable relationship: they depend upon each other. "The object of cruel optimism here appears as the thing within any object to which one passes one's fantasy of sovereignty for safekeeping"—even as (perhaps mostly when) subjects feel utterly powerless over their own lives (Berlant 2011: 43). One clutches to the fantasy of "being X and having X," to promises—the hollow shells of unfulfilled, perhaps unfulfillable, desires (Berlant 2011: 44). The practice of wanting an object "provides a way to negotiate one's incoherence" (Berlant 2011: 135), organizing a subject to cover over the cracks in normative agency. The subject seeks reciprocal relations with the world outside itself in order to reproduce that world intelligibly and sustain feelings of autonomous individuality. We desire to find forms, objects and people in relation to which we can sustain a "coasting sentience." Sovereignty is just one more fantasy in a cluster of fantasies about "the good life" that sustains subjects' false consciousness about the world, blinding them to the reality of their oppression.

These optimistic fantasies "justify so much exploitation" (Berlant 2011: 105)—they are cruel, in large part because they soften the blows of their cruelty; cruelty comes to feel comfortable (a comfort people confuse with happiness). Many holding these fantasies lack control over the material shape of their lives after the dream of upward

mobility following WWII has evaporated in the wake of major post-Fordist structural transition and economic downturn. Yet they hold to these life-organizing ideals, which keep them hoping again and again for something that continues to disappoint and demoralize:

> The world economy now is revealing that there is little structure on which to hang the 'good life' fantasy of upward mobility and intimate continuity that was sold as a domesticating package to postwar urban national/global subjects. My claim is that the insistence on normative fantasy objects in the absence of a world for them isn't just psychotic or personal but a general situation now, fomenting a 'drama of adaptation' in which people have to be seen seeing that they no longer have an account of how to live (Berlant quoted in Berlant and Prosser 2011).

Without usable scripts with which to enact one's life, it is not individually "psychotic" but structurally necessary to believe in these. Optimism is at once a coping strategy, allowing them to cope with the radical upheavals in the neoliberal present, and something that allows them to keep on keeping on. The subjects in *Richard III* and *King Lear* also misrecognize a world that is clearly failing—one of kingly rule and authority and hierarchy and the right of primogeniture—mistaking it for a world that they can exist healthily in. For example, so many generations of chasing the crown in *Richard III* has made it next to impossible for subjects cathected to this ideal to relinquish it.

The way Berlant describes it, subjects become so cathected to their optimistic attachments, that optimism becomes an economy onto itself. You become optimistic about optimism itself, as optimism generates its own structure of feelings. The subject protects herself from threatening objects by "animating new ones, animating animation itself…" (Berlant 2011: 145). You can protect yourself from a depressing reality (or you *think* you can) by investing in optimism. Of course, this analysis dichotomizes reality and fantasy in perhaps too rigid a way. Sometimes Berlant writes as if dream and reality are

like light and shade, without penumbra or ambiguity: for example, when she decries "Splitting off political optimism from t*he way things are*" as a move that "can sustain many kinds of the cruelest optimism" (Berlant 2011: 228, my emphasis). Further, to establish this distinction between a "dreamy" optimism and "the way things are" is to forget, as Arendt believed, that politics is not a sphere where reality and fantasy can be so easily discerned and to speculate about the "genuineness" of another's reality breeds hypocrisy. "In politics, more than anywhere else, we have no possibility of distinguishing between being and appearance. In the realm of human affairs, being and appearance are indeed one and the same" (Arendt 1990: 98). Just as an actor will by necessity put part of themselves into any role, these scenes of optimistic attachment Berlant describes involve too the concrete realities of those that dream.

Berlant, along with Ahmed, also links optimism to the desire for conventionality. Optimism is always, Berlant says, "normatively mediated" (Berlant 2011: 184). Even as heterofamilial-economic and national-racial norms are collapsing, people continue to shape their dreams by them. What is worse, people aspiring to the good life's normative/utopian zone are stuck in what Berlant calls "survival time—the time of struggling, drowning, holding onto the ledge, treading water—the time of not-stopping" (Berlant 2011: 169). Especially now, as the stuff of one's dreams is unraveling, anxiety intensifies and there is all the more desire to hold onto what seems right. Instead of reinventing new life forms, new ideals, people take refuge in normalcy "as a ground of dependable life;" they reinvest their hopes in the cruelly deferred promises of capital, or in the desire for reciprocity and recognition within the family, the state, the corporation, or simply in the quotidian aspiration to "feel normal" and worthy and a comfortable,

unconflicted sense of belonging (Berlant 2011: 170). People are drawn into "a circuit of reseduction and despair that so often absorbs genuine energy for social change" (Berlant 2011: 259). Most of the subjects Berlant highlights in the book are coasting in feedback loops of normativity, reproducing its patterns indefinitely.

Berlant's arguments are not quite allegations of "false consciousness." When she describes what she calls "stupid optimism," the stupid subjects manifesting such delusions seem to be made "stupid" by the system, not because they started out that way. "By 'stupid' I mean that faith that adjustment to certain forms or practices of living and thinking—for example, the prospect of class mobility, the romantic narrative, normalcy, nationality, or a better sexual identity—will secure one's happiness" (Berlant 2011: 126). One adjusts in the hope that today's disappointment will materialize into tomorrow's success, *if I just try one more time*. Berlant offers an analogy from a novel to visualize the pattern of this disappointment: the person who tries *just one more time* is like "a starving lab animal which will keep pressing the button that once supplied it with food, even though the button now jolts its poor small body with increasing doses of electric shock" (Gaitskill quoted in Berlant 2011: 148). The rat is driven toward what harms it: not only because it expects food, but also because of familiarity with the scene. Rats hope they will be fed, but all they get is shock, which is also a comfortable scene they recognize. This is the "double bind" of cruel optimism: the scene of everyday comfort is also the scene of violence. Despite Berlant's efforts to detach her analysis from familiar narratives of critique, this analogy of "poor small bodies" desiring happiness aligns with traditional ways in which optimists are portrayed as naifs and dupes. One thinks of innocents like Pollyanna more often than villains like Richard III, sustaining the traditional connection

of goodness = innocence = happiness = optimism. Optimists are often child-like, not yet jaded by the tragic realities of life. They do not know enough. The argument of this chapter is that when we refuse the traditional association between intelligence or craftiness and a pessimistic cynicism, and embrace the optimism of (highly intelligent) villains, new political moods come to view, energies to revitalize contemporary politics. As I shall show, optimists are not always impossibly perfect, innocent, or stupid.

To summarize Berlant's critique of optimistic attachment: 1) it nurtures the ideal of the sovereign subject; 2) it attaches one to unfulfillable modes of life and begins a cycle of longing for objects that distract from present misery; 3) it attaches us to the desire for conventional belonging and makes alternative imaginaries harder to engage; 4) it makes people politically vulnerable or weak, strengthening the link between optimism and their exploitation.

Sara Ahmed examines optimism as an emotion, not, as Berlant does, as an affective structure. Nonetheless, Ahmed's criticisms resonate with Berlant's, partly because she conceives of happiness as future-oriented. Ahmed questions happiness's role as the main aim of human action, as what gives "purpose, meaning and order to human life" (Ahmed 2010: 1). Both Berlant and Ahmed believe happiness and optimism to be disciplinary. Subscribing to the authority of future-oriented desires, fulfilling the mandate to imagine the future in a certain way, one affirms the orders that be, which "define and regulate what is thinkable in advance of thought" (Ahmed 2010: 161). When researchers use data to reach conclusions as to certain ways of living that make people "happier," they reinvigorate the hold of a conservative set of ideals (research cited in Ahmed 2010: 3-4). Again, like Berlant, Ahmed assumes both that normative ideals of self, family and

society from the post-WWII era are failing today and that such ideals acquire an even tighter grip on our psychic and political lives in times of crisis.

Again, like Berlant, Ahmed criticizes happiness for the insular economy it generates. Not only do people view happiness as an endpoint but also it becomes a *means* for achieving more happiness (Ahmed 2010: 199). One first links happiness to certain ways of living, then correlations (married people and happiness, e.g.) become causalities, and then certain types of family arrangements are refigured as the cause of happiness. Scholars who champion happiness, according to Ahmed, come to "redescribe what is already evaluated as being good as good" (Ahmed 2010: 7). This research both tells us what we value and teaches us what we should value, and—surprise!—what we should value is already what we value.

Optimism can be a technology of control and stabilization. Promises of happiness can "keep things in place" (Ahmed 2010: 189). Ahmed argues that happiness norms are about predictability—stable families, loves, etc.—losing touch with the original etymology of happiness as "hap," chance. Happiness has been seen as "outside the reach of fortune," beyond contingency. One thinks of Pollyanna's "Glad Game"—a technique for looking on the bright side—that helps one secure happiness despite the slings and arrows of bad luck. "This fantasy of happiness is a fantasy of self-control" (Ahmed 2010: 207). The normative demand to live life "the right way" forecloses other possibilities. The expectation of a happy future is not alive to chance encounters or accidental arrivals. The normative system survives by "grounding itself in inevitability" (Ahmed 2010: 165). Instead, an unhappy politics opens up "possibilities for being in other ways" (Ahmed 2010: 223).

If alternative futures threaten this happy fantasy, so do alternative affects. Ahmed also criticizes happiness for shutting out what she terms "affect aliens." Affect aliens stray from the normative paths to happiness, "because they live in the gaps between its lines" (Ahmed 2010: 223). A queer pessimist, for example, "refuses to be optimistic about 'the right things' in the right kind of way" (Ahmed 2010: 162). She is estranged from the present, opening up the conditions of possibility for the new. "This is why affect aliens can be creative: not only do we want the wrong things, not only do we embrace possibilities that we have been asked to give up [e.g., refusing to just 'get over' past injustice and move towards reconciliation], but we create life worlds around these wants. When we are estranged from happiness, things happen" (Ahmed 2010: 218). Affect aliens allow us to return to the "hap" of happiness—the chance element that disappears in normative notions of happiness.

Normative models of happiness blind us to forms of injustice by screening out the suffering of "affect aliens." "The wrong of happiness is that it participates in the localization and containment of misery, the misery of those who cannot inhabit the apparently empty sign of happiness" (Ahmed 2010: 195). If happiness is the usual, then misery stays "within walls" (ibid). Unhappiness "gets in the way" of the general norm, which is never questioned (as happiness stays the agreed-upon *telos* of human action). Suffering is ugly to look at, so we conceal it in order to pursue our happiness in uncompromised fashion. She writes: "Revolutionary forms of political consciousness involve heightening our awareness of just how much there is to be unhappy about" (Ahmed 2010: 222). Happiness is complicit in prolonging suffering by not acknowledging it. Happy imagined futures also allow us to endure suffering in the

present, as the future is imagined to be a long-awaited compensation for present suffering (Ahmed 2010: 183). Berlant would call this "slow death" optimism—daily dying made bearable by an imagined future that never comes.

To summarize the above critiques of "happy futures" expounded by Ahmed: 1) visions of happy futures tend to rehearse normative ideals that are, for most, unfulfillable; 2) they tend to recycle themselves in our psychic lives; 3) optimism colonizes the imagination and eliminates scenarios of alternative futures; 4) happiness shuts out "affect aliens" and 5) disguises present and persistent suffering in non-normative populations.

As with Berlant's, Ahmed's arguments tend to invoke a logic of deception: Optimists do not see how they contribute to the reproduction of the violence in the social order because they do not see what lies beyond the opaque horizons of their happiness. Promises of happiness never keep their word. Optimism perseveres because desire is a bottomless abyss. Affect aliens are smarter than all that. The world, rather than enabling their fantasies, presents stumbling blocks. In refusing to engage with the world as they know it, affect aliens hold the most promise for alternative futures. A revolutionary moment happens as affect aliens recognize the cause of their suffering—which happy subjects misrecognize. "[T]he revolutionary is the one who refuses happiness" (Ahmed 2010: 192).

The last critic of optimism I consider, Joshua Dienstag, sets optimism against a more respectable pessimism (from his position as a self-described Nietzschean pessimist; Dienstag 2006). Dienstag claims that in Nietzsche's thought, tragedy is allied to pessimism.[75] Nietzsche found that in being awakened to a tragic pessimism, knowledge

[75] Dienstag (2006) acknowledges that Nietzsche finds the dichotomization of pessimism and optimism untenable: they are not "two equal, if opposite, ways of looking at the world" (Dienstag 2006: 167). Rather,

of an illogical world-order, "I had to invent a counterpart for myself. Perhaps I know best why man alone laughs: he alone suffers so deeply that he had to invent laughter. The unhappiest and most melancholy animal is, as fitting, the most cheerful" (Nietzsche 1968: 91). For Nietzsche, optimism or pessimism are not ways of being attached to objects or the world; they are simply outlooks. If the pessimist can be cheerful, then there is the same lack of correlation in emotion (cheerful) and the ways of organizing the world (pessimism) that Berlant tracks: one can have optimistic attachments and be nervous, or fearful, or happy.

Like Berlant and Ahmed, Dienstag too see pessimists as more realistic, since they embrace an imperative to coexist with endless suffering, welcoming "the pessimistic annihilation of illusions" (Nietzsche quoted in Dienstag 2006: 190). All three critics of optimism link optimism to a certain blindness to suffering. Suffering comes with an acceptance of the brutal inability to control our course over time. If the pessimist is the realist, again, the optimist is the delusioned dupe—Nietzsche goes further in calling him a moral coward. Optimists indulge in "active self-deception that ma[kes] life more tolerable but less genuine" (Dienstag 2006: 172). Here again, optimism is tied to the insistence upon a "just" and ordered universe, and upon conventionality morality that spins that tale.

Dienstag associates optimism with a rationality that "insists that there is only one path and one means with which to walk that path" (Dienstag 2006: 185). This is similar to Ahmed's fear. Pessimism, in contrast, sets out on no preordained path; it "promotes an unblinkered reexamination of the world, and of the self, without built-in moral

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pessimism is "older and more original," Dienstag quotes Nietzsche as saying (ibid.). I do not want to quarrel with Dienstag in claiming optimism to be "better" than pessimism—Nietzsche himself says at one point that there cannot be answers to the question of which worldview is "right" (Nietzsche 1968: 38).

assumptions" (Dienstag 2006: 187). It is optimism that "inhibits truly free inquiry" (ibid). The horizon of human possibility shrinks under its gaze. What is more, optimism tends toward asceticism. It is easier to have faith in an ordered universe if one denies the fluidity of the self, our lack of complete self-understanding and definitive ego-boundaries. "We ourselves are no different from the world to which we are condemned; we are not islands of being in a sea of becoming. We too are nothing else but a constant transformation and development" (Dienstag 2006: 198). The self is more vulnerable for the pessimist, as pessimists embrace change and becoming. This can be liberating. Optimists of the Socratic variety would rather eliminate the joys of becoming and exist instead in a static state where our best interests are eternally transparent.

To sum up the above, Dienstag argues that optimism: 1) is a less genuine way of looking at a fundamentally tragic, illogical world; 2) blinds people to suffering and allows them to embrace a prefabricated set of moral values of deservingness; 3) insists on only one correct path forward; 4) denies the fluidity of the self and the flux of the world.

We can compile from Berlant, Ahmed, and Dienstag this compelling critique of optimism: it 1) perpetuates myths of the sovereign subject; 2) attaches one to normative traditional modes; 3) propels one into a cycle of longing and therefore distracts from the present misery of "affect aliens" (Dienstag/Nietzsche adds the insight that traditional moral notions of deservingness allow us to blame these aliens); 4) is normative, so in this cycle of longing for objects (especially alluring in times of crisis), it seems that there is only one path forward, the well-trod one; 5) makes change harder to imagine; 6) makes

people stupid, enabling their continued oppression; and 7) does not deal with the tragic, immoral, illogical world, a world of becoming.[76]

What Is Villainy To Optimism?

To address each of the above critiques, either to register subtle disagreements, to debunk them altogether, or to suggest an alternative approach, I turn to Shakespeare's optimistic villains, in his plays and in their afterlives in American productions and fiction, who 1) think of themselves as sovereign in motivational ways; 2) are attached only to traditional values that suit their designs; 3) are themselves affect aliens within their world; 4) take alternative paths forward; 5) imagine change; 6) are brilliant and refuse to be oppressed; and 7) thrive in a world of becoming, even if it eventually overtakes them. This vitally affirmative mood is essential for getting "unstuck" from the present. It is true that these villains all have an attachment to what turns out to be, by the end of the play, what Berlant calls "compromised conditions of possibility whose realization is discovered either to be impossible, sheer fantasy, or too possible, and toxic" (Berlant 2011: 24). These attachments are "cruel" because the object of desire threatens their well-being, but the desire for the object allows them to redeem their existence, which has been given no value in the world they inherit. These villains do not seek happiness; their games—techniques through which they reshape the world they have been given—lend purpose to their lives. Shakespeare's villains, particularly in *Richard III* and *King Lear*, provide us with alternative ways to think through the (sometimes broken) promises of optimism and to defend optimism against its critics.

[76] Berlant (2011) and Ahmed (2010) and I are all speaking of subjects caught in unjust structural situations. The difference is that those in Berlant's study fail to repudiate their failed lives (because of optimistic attachments to unfulfillable ideals or fantasies), whereas my villains take action against those they hold responsible.

Of course, even in a play like *King Lear* where good and evil seem to manifest in such extremes, good and evil also register as personal judgments, perspectives, implicated in each other.[77] Villainy almost assumes a will for evil, but we are shaped and scarred by the times and places in which we put our lives, the atmospheres that provoke our moods. Villains are villains only from certain angles; Smiley makes Shakespeare's villains heroes. Perhaps we are all villains, insofar as we can never be 100% not villain. Good and evil is a knot impossible to undo. Of course, not all of us are as morally unredeemable as a Regan or a Richard, but nobody's perfect.

In the world according to Shakespeare, even the supposedly "good" characters act in morally questionable ways: for example, both Edgar and Cordelia refuse their fathers the consolation of knowing their offspring loves them.[78] A testy Cordelia speaks with scorn to her sisters in the first scene: "I know you what you are, / And like a sister am most loath to call / Your faults as they are named" (*Lr.* 1.1.270-72). Not a very becoming line; again, Cordelia is doing her "duty" and speaking according to her "bond" as a sister. But Cordelia's bonds seem entirely emotionless. When Lear asks her to speak, she criticizes her sisters for not being bonded to their husbands properly. Only she knows the right "bonds." Consider too Kent's abuse of Oswald and his insolence to characters who are not yet revealed to be evil in 2.2. Kent seems to make the world into moral black and whites: those who are not clearly for Lear must be against him and therefore punished. The non-villains in the play are those who most fervently believe in the morally

[77] Cavell notes "how radically implicated good is in evil" (Cavell 1987: 283).
[78] Consider how many times Edgar says "Tom's a cold" (five)—cold being not only a temperature but a feeling as well. Bradley also notes how his spiteful lines to his dying brother "chill one's feeling for him" (Bradley 2007: 231).

unredeemable villain. They consider what's "right" to be patently unquestionable. Things are simple for the "good" characters.[79]

The villains are similarly not always unconditional degenerates. Consider, for example, how Goneril is the character least concerned with distinctions of rank.[80] She and her sister do not see Edmund as an outcast; instead they share a lack of respect for rank that disgusts Edgar. When Edgar finds out that Goneril loved "the Bastard" no matter his illegitimacy, he cries: "O indistinguish'd space of woman's will!" (*Lr.* 4.6.266). We can easily imagine just how frequently Edmund was reminded of his bastardy throughout his life by the fact that Edgar callously mentions it after he wounds him: "The dark and vicious place where thee he [Gloucester] got [the adulterous bed where you were born] / Cost him his eyes" (*Lr.* 5.3.171-2). Edmund then responds with pathetic defeat: "Thou'st spoken right. 'Tis true. / The wheel is come full circle. I am here" (*Lr.* 5.3.172-3)—"here" naming the lowest point on Fortune's wheel, a place that Edmund has occupied his entire life. Even as his enemy smarts to death crushed by fortune's wheel, Edgar raises the matter of his illegitimacy in moral judgment—adding insult to injury.[81]

The villains in these plays drive the play forward. Their optimism is deviant, cruel, motivated, animated, full of feeling. Sometimes we lose sight of the ultimate aim or

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[79] It must be admitted, however, that the plays seem to affirm the importance of respecting right. When Buckingham dies, he notes that God has given him "in earnest what I begged in jest" (*R3* 5.1.22). God seems to be no respecter of moods or jokes; He seems just as cheerlessly dour and morally upright as Cordelia or Edgar.

[80] Consider too Oswald's unswerving faithfulness to his mistress, Goneril—as selfless as the service of Kent and the Fool to Lear (Booth 1983: 46).

[81] Gloucester treats Edmund no better than Edgar does. Although in the first scene he professes to love him as much as Edgar, other lines betray his partiality (*Lr.* 1.1.19). Gloucester confides to a disguised Kent in Act 3 that "No father [loved] his son [Edgar] dearer" than he (*Lr.* 3.4.157). It is not coincidental that parents in both plays at hand play favorites—and the least favorite becomes the villain (Queen Elizabeth favors Edward and Clarence; Gloucester Edgar, and Lear Cordelia). We know from the first line of *King Lear* that favoritism is a theme of that play, and that Lear favors Albany over Cornwall.

the moral valence of the schemes, just to delight in the movement and the velocity. It sometimes seems even the villains delight more in their infinite energy than in any outcome they hope for, absorbed as they are in rocketing past their enemies, kicking up their heels at prescribed patterns of existence. Although this energy might be a fortification that eventually buckles under, without it, we remain captive in a despairing present, as does Lear. Their happy machinations keep them from being "stuck." Berlant speaks of the present moment as an "impasse," with the sense of passivity it implies (Berlant 2011: 4). The present moment becomes elongated in times of "crisis ordinariness"—a term that describes the imperial violence of these plays as well as today's environment (Berlant 2011: 10). These optimistic devils bypass the impasse. They do this by viewing the time of the past as provisionally finished, cut from a manipulatable present that must be woven into the future.

Richard III and *King Lear* are appropriate plays with which to address the question of the sovereign subject because the crux of the play bears on the question of sovereignty—reign over self and other human subjects. Identifying with the sovereign subject has become problematic today for a number of theorists in addition to Berlant. Liberal individualism burdens subjects with heroic expectations of control and self-empowerment, fantasies that they can bootstrap their way up in the world, even as most subjects experience forms of domination and dependence (Anker 2012). This easily leads to what Wendy Brown has described as the "starkly accountable yet dramatically impotent…late modern liberal subject" (Brown 1995: 69). There is a belief that, as Berlant puts it, "world-building at a historic scale requires the drama of inflated sovereignty, or politics" (Berlant 2011: 258). This is certainly what Lear and Richard

think. For both, their fantasies end badly, but the positive benefits of the mood of their desire for sovereignty cannot be discounted. Without that, the only alternative for these villains, trapped by circumstance, crushed by cramping limitations, would be to indulge implacably a Nietzschean *ressentiment* (Nietzsche 2007). Subjects who seek the crown, like Richard, quite literally seek an identification with the state. Thinking one is sovereign bestows a measure of (however problematic) self-respect on a subject, and for Richard it becomes a kind of warped, sacred patriotism: *I want this for the state* shades into *I am the state*. Edmund asks the gods to "stand up for bastards" (*Lr*. 1.2.22) because society has not; society has done everything possible to undermine his sovereignty and sense of self-worth. This scene he frames with his asides, which gives a strange sense of holding the scene in place temporally despite developing circumstances within it. It allows him to revoke his faith in an ordered universe—hubristically, yes, but otherwise he would be paralyzed. These villains' minds are so fabulously canalized—their primary thought all the time is of themselves—but this seems to be their only mode of survival in a world that was always against them. The fantasy of autonomous agency allows them to imagine alternative futures with courage. To doubt the sovereignty of the will rehearses what Edmund call "the excellent foppery of the world" (*Lr*. 1.2.109), that is, the world's foolish belief in fate and a superstitious ordering of the universe. Faced with this simplified choice between free will and fate, these villains imagine agency as something that elevates and transforms. If sovereignty is, as Berlant says, "a nightmarish burden," it can also be a joyful one (Berlant 2011: 43). This is true not only for kings: Edmund, for example, simply aspires to inherit his father's lands and be "master" of an estate (*Lr*. 1.2.16). His self-esteem impels his desire to have land commensurate with his view of

himself. Berlant does not altogether deny the uses of sovereignty or jettison the concept wholesale because of its association with democracy. Because the concept of sovereignty is closely associated with the liberal notions of individual autonomy and liberty, to renounce a politics of sovereign persons might give dominant groups the privilege to define sovereignty in a way that could be damaging for equality (Berlant 2011: 98).

Nonetheless, what I hold up as laudable here is more the general mood of these villains rather than what their hopes of sovereignty do or do not get them. Optimism not only drives these villains forward but also outward, into an expansion of self and world, an assemblage—an ever-increasing archive of selves, encounters, affects, postures, actions, and objects of desire. Personality is a series of episodes, elusive yet indelible, each new experience rewiring the make-up of our supposedly sovereign subjectivity—even though these villains do not view themselves this way.

In their minds, Shakespeare's "villains" already inhabit theatrically—perform—the sovereignty they so desperately seek. Feeling a certain way becomes a form of self-fashioning. Other characters engage in maintenance for the majority of the play: Kent and Cordelia seek to keep their relationship to Lear what it was; Edgar seeks to keep his father alive. This maintenance is no better than endurance. As Edgar tells his miserable father, "Men must endure / Their going hence even as their coming hither. / Ripeness is all" (Lr. 5.2.9-11). Men are just waiting around for death like fruit rotting off a tree. Oddly, this is Edgar's response to Gloucester depression, his "ill thoughts" (ibid., 9). Cheering him up is to remind him that life is about endurance for the ethically "good" characters. But our villains want more than to *maintain*; they seek to *make*. The spectacular actions of our villains could not be accomplished without possessing the

trifecta overlap of 1) performative, theatrical action[82], 2) optimism, and 3) the courage to act. They stage their sovereignty, heroically, with a frank, flagrant fakery in order to preserve the motor of their lives, their optimism. They do not seek to achieve security, to arrange normative ideals at becoming angles; they want thrills beyond what the love plot or other conventional narratives can offer them. Their fantasies may seem grandiose, but to them they fall within the ambit of the achievable. Berlant talks about the "many sacrifices people make to remain in proximity to mirages of sovereignty" (Berlant 2011: 119), but for these villains, acting as if they did not have sovereignty would be the most difficult sacrifice.

The Anti-Normativity Of Tragic Optimism

Villains have a fraught relationship with the traditional order of things. Many seem to suffer a sort of boredom with the normal quotidian of the present that compels them to try and bestow meaning on, or at least an *excitement* on, their lives. They arrange a small portion of an otherwise meaningless world for themselves to give purpose to their individual existence. When Goneril worries that her sister may take Edmund from her, she says that all her built-up fantasies may come crashing down "Upon my hateful life" (*Lr*. 4.2.88). It is her fantasy of love that makes her life not "hateful." Villains play by another set of rules but with the same deck of cards. This is what traditional readings of *King Lear*, which assume the villains are the villains without a second thought as to their motives, overlook. Paul Cantor, for example, argues, "The characters who scorn conventional laws as merely arbitrary distinctions turn out to behave criminally, even

[82] Howard and Rackin note that "the sheer theatrical energy of Richard's performance supersedes the moral weight of the hegemonic narrative" (1997: 112). Rossiter notes Richard's acting skill and goes further in noting his "sense of humour, his function as clown," as he generates "roars of laughter at wickedness" (Rossiter 1961: 15), likening him to Falstaff (ibid., 21). Bradley notes Edmund's sense of humour (Bradley 2007: 227). These villains are entertainers.

among themselves" (Cantor 2008: 233). What readings like this miss is the fact that these villains do not always "scorn" convention and sometimes act as if conventional laws matter, as when Regan kills the peasant for standing up against his master. Master-servant distinctions must hold.[83]

Richard and Edmund buck tradition through a marked countertemporality. Both were sent early into the world. Edmund tells us he puts no stock in time as measured by "the dragon's tale," or "Ursa major" (*Lr*. 1.2.118, 9). If their alterity was already marked before they were born, they continue it in an evolving scene of repetition, their asides and soliloquies. Both Edmund and Richard use asides as self-emancipation, liberation from the time of the undervalued images of themselves projected onto them by others. They see themselves as sovereign and valued in some way they currently are not, and this idealization of their future selves frees them from themselves as they exist in the world of the play. The asides constitute a form of oblique time, at an angle to the linear, freeing them from a forced sociability.[84] They seek a new audience in us, far from the scalding scrutiny of the other characters. Asides are a technique for drawing in a transcendent world *vis-à-vis* the world of the play and sending it away at the time of their own choosing.

Traditional meanings have a special applicability to Richard as a deformed man. Richard's relatives treat him according to the neo-Platonic physiognomical assumption

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83 Repentance when evil characters die would signal a final heeding of moral categories, but not all villains, even in these plays, repent. Richard simply regrets not winning; the only thing Regan and Goneril probably regret is losing their man. As for other plays, consider how the queen in *Cymbeline*, in a comically placed caesura, "repented / The evils she hatch'd were not effected" (*Cymbeline* 5.5.59-60)!

84 Drew Daniel argues that dramatic asides disturb temporality and the fiction of the playworld in the way that soliloquies do not (Daniel 2013: 139-141). Asides also "seem to trouble the division between private thought and public speech" and allow the audience "a kind of sidelong participation in moments of shared perception and audition" (Daniel 2013: 133, 133-4). A.P. Rossiter calls Richard's asides an "actor's technique," "the essence of his chuckling private jokes" (Rossiter 1961: 18).

that the outside is a transparent window into the inner soul.[85] Early modern English culture entertained *both* the idea that selves are unknowable and that they can be fully transparent—which work together in dialectic with a figure like Richard, who is supposedly knowable in his deformity but dissembles (Maus 1995: 28). Richard's deceptive skill complicates the semiotic identification of his disfigurement. Francis Bacon states that, "Deformed persons are commonly…*void of natural affection*" (Bacon quoted in Torrey 2008: 136). One might observe this common void to all our villains—and an optimistic sheen covering it over. Or perhaps it is truer to say that they invest in *unnatural* affections. Regan, Goneril and Edmund create through their adultery a parallel sensory space of love that cannot be attained within the normative world of the marriage contract. In a play where striving for love is the main theme, the ugliness of what passes for normative love drives these villains elsewhere. Hence the touching nature of Cornwall's invitation to Edmund that he "shall find a dearer father in my love;" this new family embraces Edmund the way his blood family did not (*Lr*. 3.5.20-1).[86] Families disappoint these villains. Excited about the possibilities stretching out into the future before him without the encumbrance of his family, Richard says his brothers' deaths will "leave the world for me to bustle in" (*R3* 1.1.152). Right now he can only bustle in front of us, in secret, in his own corner of the world. These villains "grow," they "prosper," as Edmund says (also in secret; *Lr*. 1.2.21), within these dreamscapes in which they shape

85 See Torrey 2008 for a wonderful overview of the contemporary opinion on the "science" of physiognomy.

86 In some notable ways, Lear's villains counterpose a social environment of acceptance and belonging over Lear's of ownership and possession. Ownership rights (e.g., the 100 knights he insists upon) seem to produce in Lear a domineering truculence, a testy mood of defiance, limited as his insight is to the oversized alphabet blocks of his childish anger in which he seeks a meaning to his existence in his ability to dole out his possessions for the lack of anything more meaningful.

for themselves avenues in which to "bustle in." They make trouble to disrupt normative patterns of social order.

There are no prefabricated values for these villains. Nietzsche admires something similar when he writes in *The Will To Power* 382, "I assess the power of a will by how much resistance, pain, torture it endures and knows how to turn to its advantage" (Nietzsche 1968: 206). Contra Dienstag, optimism is not tied to the idea of an ordered universe for evil-doers like Edmund and Richard. It is rather the ability to make everything work. Optimism is optimization, flexibility. Edmund designates events as means to his optimism: "All's meet with me that I can fashion fit" (*Lr*. 1.2.168). What comes his way, he can fashion to his own designs. When Cornwall is unexpectedly expected, Edmund thrills at the prospect, "The Duke be here tonight? The better! best! / This weaves itself perforce into my business" (*Lr*. 2.1.14-15). Everything can be turned to his advantage.

These villains earn our regard for challenging an existing order that excludes them from the realm of the fully human. Optimism, then, need not always be tied to a normative vision. Shakespeare's villains refuse to be optimistic, as Ahmed puts it, "about 'the right things' in the right kind of way" (Ahmed 2010: 162). Ahmed considers false consciousness as a way to understand "how the social is arranged through the sharing of deceptions that precede the arrival of subjects" (Ahmed 2010: 165). False consciousness can "block other possible worlds…such that possibilities are lost before they can be lived, experienced, or imagined" (ibid). Perhaps we can imagine a pre-history to the play where Edmund and Richard were under the spell of false consciousness. One must first recognize that one's wretchedness is caused by social forces, not nature, before one can

rise against those forces. Edmund is something of a wretch, a stranger and an exile. Edmund "hath been out [away] nine years, and away he shall again" (*Lr*. 1.1.30-1). Perhaps this is not a going that Edmund desires. It was perhaps far from his homeland that he became conscious of his bastardy as loss, that he began to feel the sense of estrangement. He has never been well-adjusted to this world. The cloak of the normative veils "structural violence" (Ahmed 2010: 170) so well, it is impossible to see it. Just as Edmund's whereabouts the previous nine years are veiled to us, so too are the circumstances of the structural violence that may have befallen him. Bracketing judgment as to the "justness" of his cause, we can at least recognize how his being away has made him an outsider, and obviously a pained one.

The Alienation Of Affect: Richard Versus The Heavy Mood Of Mourning

Another critique of Berlant's is that optimism propels one into a cycle of longing for objects one can't have. Here Berlant credits misrecognition—the psychic process by which fantasy recalibrates what we encounter so that we can imagine that something can fulfill our desire (Berlant 2011: 122). Edmund imagines that being an equal will make him happy, Richard imagines that having the crown will give him satisfaction. The crown offers a way for Richard to achieve a worth and recognition from his immediate family that he has been denied. I do not mean to suggest that democratic subjects should desire the total power of kings the way Richard does. Democrats' aspirations, if they are not delusional, are by necessity less totalizing. What I admire in Richard and Edmund are their methods, the techniques of mood, their courage, and their theatricality, in their quest for a kind of equality on their terms. It fails for them—they end the play as the outsiders that they were from the beginning—but their desires are not nothing. The purpose we

give our hopes are not nothing. They may fuel our very desire to live. You cannot untether the desire from the object from the identity of the subject who desires. Richard is happiest[87]—with his energized sense of possibility, lightness of bearing, and hearty *anaesthetics* towards what might bode pain—when he is alone, plotting, or carrying out his plots with a rich theatricality. All villains delight in drama. Richard delights in being an affect alien with only his dreams to sustain him. This resonates with Ahmed's description of affect aliens as creative, as actors (theatrical and otherwise), people who "want the wrong things," embracing possibilities that they "have been asked to give up" as Richard "gave up" the crown to his older brother (Ahmed 2010: 218).

Not only is Richard an affect alien, but he makes affect aliens of others. If he himself cannot move forward in time without optimism, the mood he generates among others is an intense dissatisfaction with the present with the intent of keeping them stuck in time. Richard depresses the hopes of others so that he can grow: "it stands me much upon / To stop all hopes whose growth may damage me" (*R3* 4.2.60-61). This is not to deny that Richard is himself an affect alien—the director of *Richard III* in *The Goodbye Girl* (1977) who envisions a queer Richard indicates as much with his suggestion that Richard is "the queen who wanted to be king." But Richard also makes it impossible to tell for sure who the alien is. Sorrow disrupts the rhythm of life—"Sorrow breaks seasons and reposing hours, / Makes the night morning, and the noontide night" (*R3* 1.4.72-3)—specifically the rhythm of the life of his enemies, and Richard fosters that disruption among others. Mood must have the right rhythms on which to coast, and Richard is a great orchestrator of pacing. When Anne resists his kindnesses with quick rejoinders, he

87 Happy also means suitable, fortunate and convenient, a meaning it carries in *Richard III* ("In happy time, here comes the Duke…" [*R3* 3.4.21)—and villains pursue this side of its meaning more energetically; they desire things suitable to their wishes, not necessarily to achieve happiness as a goal.

beseeches her, let us "leave this keen encounter of our wits / And fall something into a slower method" (*R3* 1.2.115-6). To argue less hastily untangles her from her rage. Tempo lubricates a change in mood.

When Richard tries something similar at the end of the play—in 4.4., which exists as a microcosm of the play until this point—when he tries once again to turn a scene of woe into a scene of wooing, it fails so extravagantly because he has made from his family members too many affective aliens. At the start of the scene we witness a circle of tears, cursing, and general woe, a scene that Richard attempts to interrupt. Margaret reminds us that the time of grief is long, that the causes of this grief travel far back into the past. Joys have been "intestate," past, short-lived, bequeathing nothing. Language, Margaret's cursing, is a means to mitigate the agonies. She schools Elizabeth and the Duchess how to curse, a weak sort of homeopathic antidote to evil. The women become united in their sorrows and intercept Richard and his train. The mood Richard brings to the scene is one of confidence and bravado. He attempts to drown out their exclamations with his fanfare. How desperate his attempts at changing the mood have become. Richard is unaware of the affective exchanges between his mother, sister-in-law and grandmother at the start of this scene. Like the scene before where Anne mourns her husband, these women too have been mourning. But the cycle of emotional exchange these women set into motion has congealed into affect. The present and the future are closed for these women, whereas for Richard the present remains open. Knocked about by insufferable agonies, the women under Richard's reign remain stuck in the cycle of grief, a cycle that Richard remains impervious to and is eventually overtaken by. He fails to turn the mood because he underestimates the engrossing economies of grief. Ironically, he has created their

affective world: Queen Margaret early on calls Richard "troubler of the poor world's peace" (*R3* 1.3.218). In that same early scene, Richard's quip ("I did think / That thou hast called me all these bitter names" [ibid., 233-4]) can puncture the mood of Margaret's cursing. Yet now the time created by this affective infrastructure is too heavy to move.

If Richard aspires to an optimism of the present that unspools into a future, the play often remains fixed in these self-sustaining economies of sin, grief, or hope. "I am in / So far in blood that sin will pluck on sin," Richard says (*R3* 4.2.65-66). Sin incites sin, just as hope breeds hope and sorrow breeds sorrow. Even if we may envy Richard his cool acuity, intellect seems helpless against the hardened affect of others in the end. Consider Queen Elizabeth's image of cyclical grief producing grief: "All springs reduce their currents to mine eyes," she says (*R3* 2.2.68). Her tears will fall but lead back to her eyes again, which in turn produce more tears. She is a circular weeping machine. Her mother-in-law says: "I am your sorrow's nurse, / And I will pamper [overfeed] it with lamentation" (*R3* 2.2.87-88). Sorrow feeds on sorrow; it becomes an economy unto itself. Margaret says, "If sorrow can admit society, / Tell o'er your woes again by viewing mine (*R3* 4.4.38-9). They reinfect the wounds they bear as they recount stories of grief over and over again. Try as he might, Richard beats helplessly against the binding affects of their tragic story.

Richard's lack of control in puncturing the moods generated by the female characters at the end of the play mirrors his lack of control over the time. The time of grief—the time of the sigh, gentle pauses in the moment that keep trapped within them the mood of past actions, telescoping a litany of linear, multigenerational losses—clashes with the time Richard inhabits, which is more akin to a heterotemporal whirlwind of

excitement and optimistic expectation. The time mourned is like a series of episodes blending particular grief and collective grief, the climacteric and the commonplace. Time stops for them in the moment of wailing and becomes an anxious waiting for death. Hence the need to *verbalize* their woes, to learn how to concoct curses, to preserve woe forever meaningfully in endless conversation, or a curse that endures.

We see the distance between Richard's worldview and those of the women in the play most plainly in the exchange between Richard and Queen Elizabeth when he makes plain his intentions to marry her daughter. Richard thinks a happy future can right the sorrows of the past: "all the ruins of distressful times / [will be] Repaired with double riches of content. / What? We have many goodly days to see. / The liquid drops of pearl that you have shed / Shall come again, transformed to orient pearl, / Advantaging their loan with interest / Of ten times double gain of happiness" (*R3* 4.4.273.31-37). Elizabeth refuses two things here: Richard's quantification of happiness ("double riches," "ten times") and the idea that goodly days in the future can repair the past. In answer to her comment reminding him of her murdered sons, Richard replies, "Harp not on that string, madam. That is past" (*R3* 4.4.295). The past is past for Richard. He is the only character in the play so fixedly in the present at all times. The present is all he has, definitely, at the play's end. What Elizabeth tells him in this scene is that he's already used up the future. People will continue crying and grieving for their parents and children that Richard has killed: The "time to come," Richard has "Misused, ere used, by times misused o'erpast" (*R3* 4.4.326-327). The mood of his actions will accompany them into the future. Richard has caused "temporal disruption," as he is misaligned with the times, "sent" before his time as his mother notes (*R3* 1.1.20). Richard's countertemporality, the way he not

merely obstructs but fractures smooth, normative time, is especially marked in a play obsessed with linear family "lines" of succession: figuratively his "start" was already his end, as his mother says, "O my accursed womb, the bed of death!" (*R3* 4.1.53).[88] Richard promises things in the "time to come," but this time is empty. Like Lear, he has already given the future away (as Lear does in the first scene). His future is but a graveyard of past events and emotions.

As with the springs of woe in *Richard*, in *King Lear*, we witness a similar cyclical river of tears, the flood of the rainstorm, and other "overflowing liquids, representing the superflux that disorders psyche, cosmos, and polis respectively," collapsing high into low (De Grazia 30, 28). But the storm scene also telegraphs Lear's uncontrollable affects, notably his wrath. Everything Lear does seems utterly reasonless, yet he clings to the path he chooses, or doesn't choose but nonetheless pursues, with a tenacious hopelessness, his misery abstract yet singular, borne of this wrath. Nothing can reassemble his soul in the face of such harsh excess. There is only so much horror one can take before one must pull up anchors in reality and detach, taking refuge, as Lear does, in insanity, the ultimate misrecognition. Mad as he becomes, Lear bears his emotions honestly, a moving theater of all things done him by his oldest daughters—perhaps one must be mad for this kind of emotional transparency, its truth value compromised by madness. Richard's victims also sometimes engage in emotional outpourings: Clarence's moving repentance, the women's unhappiness, Buckingham's final turn to "That high all-seer" (*R3* 5.1.20). Perhaps whatever normative values the main characters hold can only be expressed through a pessimistic hopelessness, as affective aliens. But affective expression, so uncontrollable, so incontinent, expresses too a weakness that easily leads to surrender (something our

[88] On *Richard III*'s fascination with connective familial lines, see Burnett 2002.

villains never do). Although moods are the dynamic undercurrent to Richard's astonishing confidence, driving him onward—he stabbed Edward on the battlefield "in my angry mood," he says—moods are still malleable, and he always directs the current's forward flow (*R3* 1.2.238). Unlike villains who keep their emotions in check, no emotions for Lear are within proper limits, just as his present warps into a future he cannot control.[89]

But Richard's masterly control of mood finally slips in the end. Towards the end of the play it becomes obvious that Richard "reigns in the galled eyes of weeping souls" (*R3* 4.4.52). This mood of mourning ultimately is Richard's undoing. He becomes powerless against it. For everyone but Richard, the dominant emotion is fear and sorrow. Fostering distrust may have got Richard so far, but it cannot sustain his triumph. The trouble begins when we hear that the "melancholy Lord Northumberland" is "cheering up the soldiers," however that is supposed to work (*R3* 5.5.21, 24). Then Richard admits that "I have not the alacrity of spirit / Nor cheer of mind, that I was wont to have" (*R3* 5.5.26-27). The onset of a melancholy conscience. Conscience is particularly bound to the past. He pursues his thoughts and examines his past. This is the moment we know he is sunk. His turn to the past is an index of his evaporated optimism. The ghosts who appear in Richmond and Richard's dream bring with them many emotions: despair and heaviness for Richard, cheer and joy for Richmond. Feelings propel the actions of the following scenes. At the play's end, hope and joy pass from Richard to Richmond, with the

[89] In *Lear*, as Booth notes, we witness the destruction of time in ordinary definition, as seen in the Fool's supposed "prophecy" (*Lr*. 3.2.79-90). "By definition, a prophecy concerns future time, but in this play all definition is illusory" (Booth 1983: 41). The fool's ostensibly vatic account seems to concern both future time and the present. The Fool "blows apart the chronological limits of the fiction [recounted in his prophecy] and, indeed, all divisions between…past and present, present and future, future and present" (Booth 1983: 43). We are utterly unable to judge present or future, as it is impossible to navigate the time of crisis and get our bearings in this fantastic world of these characters' minds.

difference being that Richmond intends an affective distribution, enriching "the time to come with…smiling plenty" (*R3* 5.8.33-34). Richmond promises to distribute smiles among his people where Richard had doled out angst and misery.

Optimism empowers Richard through the play. One might counter that instead of optimism, this is just delusion and madness, the hollow quest after power, but it cannot be denied that Richard's mood propels him forward and allows him to achieve a kind of respect and regard among those who despised him and did not consider him an equal. Combine optimism with theatrical techniques and courage, and you have a formidable force for change. Whenever he encounters any hint of possible setback—for example, "the censures of the carping world" for his execution of Hastings, i.e. negative public perception (*R3* 3.5.66); or when citizens populate the market place looking "deadly pale" when they hear of Richard's desire to be king (*R3* 3.7.26)—his affect (channeled skillfully into the theatrical) helps restore his bearings. To overcome the majority of citizens dubious about Richard's entitlement to the thrown, Richard has Buckingham pull his theatrical tricks. Mood propels the theatrical.[90] His second-in-command assures him, "I can counterfeit the deep tragedian" (*R3* 3.5.5). And not only tragedy, for he can do blood-curdling looks (horror) and fake smiles (comedy) too. Richard anchors his optimism in moods and genres designed to scupper the doubts of his countrymen: if they can get away with this bit of play-acting, Richard tells Buckingham, "No doubt we bring

[90] Both Richard and Edmund's flagrant theatricality is sustained by tones of tender concern, by senses and signs and gestures and modes of comportment that others find comforting in their crisis. These plays frequently emphasize the impossibility of reading another's "heart" because the implication is that we are all actors. What Richard does with the citizens, uniting them in a faint "Amen" while pretending his own religious zeal, is precisely the affective drivel Richmond promises to provide when he asks the heavens to "smile" and asks God to "Enrich the time to come with smooth-faced peace, / With smiling plenty" (*R3* 5.8.33-34). Not coincidentally, Richmond's oration ends with another "Amen." Cementing the public on the affective register, a placeholder for "a potential political world" as Berlant puts it (Berlant 2011: 238), helps unite them in peace and common vision.

it to a happy issue" (*R3* 3.7.54). The main obstacle the citizens present is their mood: overwhelming pessimism. "Seldom comes the better," the second citizen says (*R3* 2.3.4).[91] This pessimism ultimately triumphs against Richard, but not before his empowerment, not before he shows his family and the world that he can meet them at their own level.

The Onwardness Of Optimism's Temporality

Part of what makes the future so exciting for our villains is that they do not exist in a narrative. The script they have been given, they refuse to follow. One might argue that being high-ranking aristocrats gives them this latitude, but I want to see them here as subjects located within a position of inequality and who refuse that situation. Richard begins the play with the word, "Now," as if he plans to re-write the course of history from the given moment.[92] His acting ability aids him in directing the course of events. In fact, each of these villains is a good actor: Regan and Goneril convince their father of their love; Edmund stages elaborate shows to "prove" his brother's evil; and Richard

[91] In this scene, we are privy to what we are not in *Julius Caesar*: a tyrant being offered the crown and refusing that offer in a show before the citizens—and indeed, perhaps Richard is what Caesar might have become had he dismantled the republic and built the empire on the blood of others.

Besides acting, what wins this scene for Richard is the affective structure of communication between politician and citizenry. Buckingham tells the people that Richard is at his prayers and "So sweet is zealous contemplation" (*R3* 3.7.94). Richard seeks to draw his audience into an immediacy between he and they not unlike the immediacy between priest and congregation. He wants his mood to circulate without mediation, to bracket out the anxious stuff of politics, the unsettled question of who is rightful heir. The people seek affective reassurance. Better to invite them into the zeal of Richard's religious moment. Buckingham says, "pardon us the interruption / Of thy devotion and right Christian zeal" (*R3* 3.7.102-3). Richard seeks to create what Berlant calls an intimate public, where "affective communication is the medium of the political" (Berlant 2011: 226). So that there will be less independent judgment and reflection among his audience, Richard engulfs them in his religiously contemplative mood. It is his mood that, he feigns, allows him to accept their "offer" of the crown: "I am not made of stone, / But penetrable to your kind entreats" (*R3* 3.7.214-5). His sense of solidarity with their feelings ("kind entreats") ostensibly makes his own desire one with theirs. As Berlant notes, when politics is "reduced to the demand for affective attunement," our citizenly skills for judging various visions of the good life atrophy (Berlant 2011: 228). So the citizens mumble a halfhearted "Amen" and return to their private lives.

[92] Of course, he also remains caught in the fabric of his times: Richard was "raised in blood," as Richmond says (*R3* 5.5.201)—that is, he was raised during internal family wars (it also carries the meaning, he was raised to the position of king through bloodshed). The War of the Roses had been fought several generations before his birth. He didn't start the fire, but he certainly fanned the flames.

delights in showing the world a mood diametrically opposed to his true one. These are not actors who follow convention. Richard even seeks to throw Church law to the wind in marrying his own niece.[93]

These villains distinguish themselves in the exceptional ways they upend traditional values. There is a progressivism implicit in my argument for their optimism[94]; it is a weapon with which they escape from a present that devalues them. This "forward!" "onward!" tilt does not necessarily presuppose future improvement. In other words, it is an "onward" but not necessarily an "upward." If Lear's pessimism is weighty and immovable, obstructing the lure of alternative (better) imaginaries or paths, these villains' hopes illustrate Richmond's statement that (the mood of) "True hope is swift" (*R3* 5.2.23). Richard's nimble switching of emotion shows mood as malleable in his hands, as it lives moment-to-moment, not fluidly or with a steady continuity (as we might imagine sovereignty to do: e.g., "for always I am Caesar" [*JC* 1.2.213]). Richard can alternate between childish, petulant schoolboy and mastermind-seducer of Queen Anne in a moment. It is this cameleon-like change that drives the play forward.

Shakespeare's villains make something strange in the appearance of everyday life. The present is, for them, ugly, and they need disguise to navigate the present moment—why so many turn to acting. They latch onto the cracks in the dominant historical narrative, the cruelties in the grand forms of intelligence for daily living—ones that call human beings "illegitimate," that fail to recognize Iago or Iaicomo's worthiness, that

[93] William C. Carroll puts the matter well: how Richard and Edmund both denounce *and desire* the social order. Richard, he writes, "accepts his place in this [his family's] hierarchy even as he works to undermine hierarchy in general" (Carroll 1992: 213). Gillian Murray Kendall argues that Edmund is "co-opted into the ideological society he initially rejects" (Kendall 1992: 255n25). I would not go that far, as I seek to celebrate their radical anti-normativism for the initial step it is.

[94] Berlant describes optimism as a propulsive force: optimism is "the force that moves you out of yourself and into the world in order to bring closer the satisfying *something* that you cannot generate on your own but sense in the wake of a person, a way of life, an object, project, concept, or scene" (Berlant 2011: 2).

laughs at Richard's deformities, Shylock's religion—and galvanize these fissures for their own alternative imaginaries. While we might not feel comfortable identifying with Shakespeare's villains or lending them our sympathy, we can surely identify with their complaints. For these are the complaints of the egalitarian-minded. We can commiserate with their feelings of subordination and identify with their campaigns for justice on their own terms. They are have-nots who want what their fellows have. Edmund would like to change places with his legitimate brother Edgar. Richard would like to change places with his older brother Edward. Optimism manifests in the desire to sustain alternative images of what life could be. Of course, their worldview is too limited for them to take the next step to imagine anything near to what we today would call democracy, a completely different world, but their moods allow them to project scenes of change, elsewheres constructed in the wake of current failures.

In contrast to the progressivism of optimism, the space between Lear's mood and cognition suspends the present within an evolving event that freezes narrative time in the drama of his moment. Consider his anger at Kent: "Peace, Kent! [There is a break here in the line, meant to indicate a pause for the time it takes to speak eight iambs—presumably allowing Lear's anger to build.] Come not between the dragon and his wrath" (*Lr.* 1.1.121-2). But if the dragon is supposed to be Lear, and wrath is supposed to be Lear's emotion, what can drive a wedge between a man and himself? Here anger registers as something outside oneself, something you catch like the flu. The head-spinning leaps in this speech between Lear's immediate "wrath," his nostalgic wistfulness at how Cordelia used to be ("I loved her most…"), and the future-oriented ceremony of his pomposity ("I do invest you jointly with my power, / Preeminence…" [*Lr.* 1.1.123, 1.1.130-1) certainly

indicate that the waning of Lear's powers and the shifts in his mood correspond to the waning of his ability to distinguish present, past and future. In the chaos of his mood swings, he seeks to freeze the present moment like the grieving women in *Richard III*. Lear tries to hold onto reality with a stake in time that the play makes impossible, because emotions like wrath keep one tethered to a moment without perspective. In *Richard III*, for example, King Edward blames wrath for his suspicions of his brother, closing off from view Clarence's kindnesses: "All this from my remembrance brutish wrath / Sinfully plucked (*R3* 2.1.119-20). There is no past in wrath's present.

There is no future either. Lear feebly tries to match pace with his fool in joke-telling (*Lr.* 1.5)[95], but he can barely hold back his darker thoughts about what he takes to be Cordelia's denial of love. As Harold Bloom has said, *King Lear*'s first three acts could play as comedy. If pessimism is the pervasive atmosphere of the play, Lear's attempts at something resembling joy get co-oped. The affect of the play shifts definitively when we lose the professional clown, Lear's fool, in Act III. Eventually, Lear cannot leave the circuit of wrath that has absorbed his every thought. His being stuck in the past keeps him from embracing an optimism that would carry him forward as Edmund and Richard go forward.

Only Lear's present stretches out indefinitely. Lear's futile line, "I'll resume the shape which thou dost think / I have cast off forever," (*Lr.* 1.4.286-7), chronicles the

[95] Consider also Orson Welles' 1953 portrayal of Lear's frenetic delight in upending the rules of order as his men display a joyous rowdiness at Goneril's palace ("King Lear" 1953). The fool's jokes put Lear and his men in a jovial mood but it is terribly chaotic, so much so that we sympathize when Goneril criticizes the "insolent retinue" and complains they make her place appear "more like to a tavern, or brothel" (*Lr.* 1.4.176, 220)—although it is true she admits to Oswald she does not mind the excuse the rowdy knights give her to upbraid her father (*Lr.* 1.3.13, 24-25). The place looks like a dump when Lear and his men leave: chairs knocked over, trash littering the floor, goblets strewn about. It's hard to take Lear's measure given the contrast of his sour mood in the first scene to his reluctant yet reckless joy in this one.

pathos of his desired relapse into the past. Lear's suffering is so *prolonged*, and it is the ethically good characters that help stretch it out. Edgar—who prolongs his father's suffering by failing to reveal his own identity to the dying man and by pretending to lead him off a deadly cliff (extending and perhaps *contributing* to his suffering)—ends the play with, "The weight of this sad time we must obey, / Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say" (*Lr*. 5.3.322-3). Weight can signify feelings of guilt, as it does with Clarence when he tells his prison-guard, "My soul is heavy" (*R3* 1.4.70), and as it might with Edgar. But perhaps this is something here learned from villains: Edgar is not proposing a return to convention, niceties, the dressage of court life. He seeks a brutal honesty, a refusal to "say the right thing," leveling any system that would dictate what "the right thing" *is*. All this lacks is the insight that lighter affects like optimism propel one out of weighty times.

Equality, Brilliance, And Becomings

In tracing proto-democratic patterns within these villains' optimism, I am concerned with the *affectively* democratic—democracy as a sensibility, a visceral experience, a sentience, a dynamic set of forces, norms, and practices that we embody through moods and states of being and perceiving. Given this concern, it is easier to conceive how I can easily follow Sam Chambers in positioning democracy as something distinct from liberalism (Chambers 2013). This is perhaps why I care less about the concept of sovereignty as essential to liberal notions of the individual (something Berlant cares about)—I am only concerned with how these villains use a fantasy of sovereignty *to posit their equality*. Here I would cite democratic theorists who take an agonistic perspective on politics, in particular Rancière because, for him, politics happens when

what Chambers calls "a logic of equality" interrupts the hierarchical order of things (Chambers 2013: 28; Mouffe 2000; Honig 1993). One of the problems with how democracy is thought today, Rancière reminds us, is that people identify "mass individualist society," the limitless growth inherent to the logic of the capitalist economy, with democracy (Rancière 2006: 20). For Rancière—and for me—a political system "tends toward democracy only to the extent that it moves nearer to the power of anyone and everyone" (Rancière 2006: 72)—moves nearer to the power of (even) the basest villain. I do not mean by democracy, then, any institution or form of government—Rancière goes so far as to say "We do not live in democracies" (Rancière 2006: 73)—but only the idea of the sensual experience of equality, which releases us from the hierarchies that structure our existence. These villains hate hierarchies in which they are not on the top. But as Adam Phillips notes, the whole idea that you do not need people (or gods) of extraordinary status to rule "turns the world upside down" (Phillips 2002: 25). This world-toppling is the result of the gods "standing up for bastards," as Edmund bids them do (*Lr*. 1.2.22). Hence democracy, for me, is about equality but also about an affective placelessness, dislocation, the loss of a set place in the (hierarchical) world. Loss and dislocation are the unintended consequences of the motions these villains set in place. In initially seeking equality, or recognition of their worth as human beings, they often get more than they bargained for.

Villains are immensely sensitive, both intellectually and emotionally. They feel their way by intuition. Although, as noted above, they invoke a model of the sovereign self in their discourse as something they aspire to, their personhood does not express any central orientation or *telos*. Instead, as Berlant notes, agency and causality are "dispersed

environmental mechanisms at the personal as well as the institutional level" (Berlant 2011: 114). Richard so easily manipulates others in large part because of the moods he puts into circulation. Villains often distribute moods contrary to the ones they themselves inhabit. If will and mood are rarely aligned, Richard takes will out of the equation and sends subjects reeling in the centrifugal gyres of his affectspheres. Mood is the hinge between perception and (theatrical) action. Although will and mood can run at cross purposes, by directing moods, villains shape how others perceive and believe. If Richard's deformity is an index of his out-of-syncness with the affectsphere he has been given, changing his surroundings requires imagining alternatives. It is the spectacular positioning of his actions within the mood he creates that makes him a genius.

As opposed to the subjects that critics of optimism imagine—dupes or almost dupes who enable their continued oppression—these villains display a brilliance that far surpasses the other characters. Being smart shields them from the everyday disappointments that structure their lives. Richard continually challenges himself with games designed to test his skill. His grossest display of audacious optimism is wooing Anne at her husband's funeral after having killed her husband. "Was ever woman in this humor wooed? / Was ever woman in this humor won? / I'll have her," he confidently tells us (*R3* 1.2.215-217). He gloats not only on his conquest but on his masterful manipulation of mood. Congratulating himself afterwards, he jokes with himself: "I did mistake my person all this while" (*R3* 1.2.139). He displays himself here as a mastermind of the affective switch. He marvels that he approached her in the mood of "her heart's extremest hate" (*R3* 1.2.219). He plays the Pollyanna here—exhorting kindness with, "Lady, you know no rules of charity, / Which render good for bad, blessings for curses"

(*R3* 1.2.68-69)—so that Anne might slip from one mood to another, one more favorable to his advances. Richard doesn't lose in the end because his plans fail. He loses his kingdom—unlike King Lear's villains whose passions get the better of them—because he loses his horse. That's all. That can happen to anybody. It's fate, not *virtù*. His Machiavellian *virtù* (as opposed to his *fortuna*) is perfect.

This scene further brings to the fore Richard's concern with comparisons between himself and his cousin (Anne's late husband), and Richard's ultimate concern to prove his equality and worth. Once alone, he outlines Edward's gifts and advantages—he is "young, valiant, wise, and no doubt right royal" (*R3* 1.2.231). He then compares them to himself, "whose all not equals Edward's moiety [half]" (ibid., 236)—very self-deprecating. Although they are persons of aristocratic personages, these villains ultimately seek an equality with their fellows.

Finally, consider again Dienstag/Nietzsche's point that this is a world "of constant flux and chaos, where no moral order can be sustained" (Dienstag 2006: 197). Tragic pessimism involves "the realization that we live in a tragic, disordered, immoral world" (ibid.). But our villains are optimistic and still thrive in a tragic world. One can be an optimist and believe that the world is tragic, disordered, and immoral—in fact, that can be the basis for hope, that things can change because they always do, because our fate is not already written. The good characters—Albany, Lear, Gloucester, Edgar—keep saying that heaven will show her vengeance eventually in her final crowning glory. Everyone in the play expects revenge/justice. It is telling, however, that one of Albany's final lines—"All friends shall taste / The wages of their virtue, and all foes / The cup of their deservings—O, see, see!" (*Lr.* 5.3.301-303) is interrupted by Lear keening over Cordelia.

There is endless deferral. While the "good" characters locate their hopefulness in the prospect of revenge, the evil characters harbor no such faith in the universe's tilt toward rightness. They know that the extraordinary and unnatural are just as much a part of the universe as the ordinary.

I have considered the mood of optimism in these villains against contemporary theorists in order to get some present-day purchase from Shakespeare and his American inheritors. Shakespeare's villains are of an almost impossible villainy, but sympathy with them is not impossible. There is a reason why *King Lear* is a tragedy (at least according to the Folio, and how it was subsequently staged) and does not often play as melodrama.[96] Tragedy gives characters a softer light in which to drift; melodrama is black and white, with justice in the end distributed accordingly. What is justice in *Lear*? In the end, even the supposedly good characters would seem to reap their comeuppance. So to say the villains are not beyond our sympathy may even be an understatement. In fact, American author Jane Smiley so identified with the villainous sisters in *King Lear* that she chose the oldest sister Goneril to narrate her novel *A Thousand Acres*, based on *King Lear* but set on an Iowan farm in the 1980s (Smiley 1991). This novel reveals a bleak sort of forward-looking attachment to the capitalist dream of more land and its devastating effects, and the sustaining efforts of the Goneril character and her sister to locate hope elsewhere.

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96 Despite Robert White's contention that "*King Lear* can travel in a family saga or a western" (White 2008: 324), two melodramatic forms according to Peter Brooks (Brooks 1976: 204). As White notes, Lear disrupts generic expectations. "A play which we regard as archetypically tragic, the touchstone of tragedy, may not have been anything of the kind in the mind of its creator and first audience. It is possible that the text as Shakespeare originally conceived and wrote it, is unsure of its genre or at least uneasily contains the potential for several contradictory genres (history, tragedy, tragi-comedy), and that it was his posthumous editors who made the decision" (White 2008: 319). Further, each character seems to think a different genre structures their relationship to the world. "In a somewhat strange way, each character seems to know he or she exists in a play, at the mercy of its plot and genre, but each has a different notion of what kind of play they are in and what the plot is" (ibid.).

Feminist Revision: Tragic And Enabling Optimism In A Capitalist Setting

Seeing *King Lear* as the "master's text," as Iska Alter puts it, Smiley's novel is more than another interpretation of the play, a counter to all the patriarchal interpretations that privilege Lear's perspective over that of the women in the play (Alter 1999: 145).[97] It is also a response, one that allows us to zoom out from the play enough to see the construction of good and bad from various viewpoints. No longer must the villainy in *Lear* seem so motiveless. No longer must the reason for Lear's madness seem so completely causeless. There is no conspiracy here to gaslight a blame-free old man. Changes in his mood—from optimistic about his decision to retire to despairing over the outcome—seem to accelerate his mental declivity. Whatever strain put on Lear's narcissism by Coredlia's answer, this delicate break surely can't account for the explosive crack up that follows. Smiley does not tell us the cause of madness but at least it is clear that there is illness ("environmental poisoning, patriarchy, or playacting"), and it is not invested with the "cosmic destructive grandeur" of Lear's (Alter 1999: 154, 153). Such constructions of good and bad in the master text follow from ideas about whose feelings are more worthy, and we see hard-boiled judgments of evil in the master's text more clearly for what they are. Cordelia and Lear were never sympathetic figures to Smiley. "On the other hand, the older sisters, figures of pure evil according to conventional wisdom, sounded familiar…. They were women, and the play seemed to be

[97] For a classic example, consider A.C. Bradley, who notes Lear's "love of absolute power," his "despotism" and "presumptuous self-will," his "autocratic impatience," but chalks it up to his "folly" (Bradley 2007: 187, 212, 214, 196). Goneril is similarly criticized by him for "her imperious will" (Bradley 2007: 225) but Bradley goes on to say of her: "She is the most hideous human being (if she is one) that Shakespeare ever drew" (ibid., 227). This is clearly because she is a woman, Bradley adds, when comparing the villains in the play: "For Edmund, not to mention other alleviations, is at any rate not a woman" (Bradley 2007: 226). In short, Bradley takes Lear at his word that he is a man "more sinned against than sinning" (ibid., 211) and assumes that we can all agree where audience sympathies lie.

condemning them morally for the exact ways in which they expressed womanhood that I recognized," Smiley writes (Smiley 1999: 161).

What Smiley brings to the fore, and what must be considered in any reading of the play, are the *circumstances* that exist underneath any narrative. A circumstance unfolds not neatly but can either intensify the present, percolate quietly through the surface of things, or explode in your face—all three ways making impossible any tidy narrative explanation of events. Smiley reminds us that what we do not know must be taken into consideration too when we set the characters on the scales of justice. Goneril is a milquetoast in Smiley's adaptation. We must ask ourselves: What did Lear do to them before the play began to earn their wrath? Feminist critics Coppelia Kahn (1986) and Lynda Boose (1982) have suggested incest as a theme in *King Lear*. Cavell takes incest in Lear more literally than do these critics, suggesting that Cordelia, being Lear's favorite daughter, might also have been abused by him (Cavell 1987: 299). In Smiley's version, the older daughters were victims of rape as children. Perhaps this play, then, is really about redress. The problem is that, even when critics embrace such a reading, they, like Booth, assume that Lear's punishments are "out of all proportion to his crime" (Booth 1983: 53; Bradley 2007; Cantor 2008). The question I raise is: How can we be sure?

Smiley's novel uncovers another kind of optimism of the so-called villains, one less ambitious, tethered to the present instead of the future. The villains are now the "good guys" but their residual optimism remains. Larry is the name of the Lear character in *A Thousand Acres*, and he is never happy. Perhaps this is because Larry has expectations about what he deserves[98], and, as Rousseau teaches us, there is nothing so

[98] When Larry divests himself of the farm, it is with a reasonable expectation of something in return. In the original text, Lear reveals that he hopes, after divestment, to rest his head on the charity of his youngest

crushing as recognizing the gap between our desires and our reality. The trouble stems, as it does in the original play, from Lear's valuation of himself so completely in accord with his traditional standards—as he credits "The offices of nature, bonds of childhood, / Effects of courtesy, dues of gratitude" (*Lr*. 2.4.172-173)—to the extent that he cannot value others according to their standards. Just as Lear's belief in the longevity of his rule led him to try to freeze time, making decrees running into the future when he can no longer make decrees, Regan suggests that Lear does not properly value his daughters in their new position. When Lear slanders Goneril to Regan, she replies with a calm, "I pray you, sir, take patience. I have hope / You less know how to value her desert / Than she to scant her duty" (*Lr*. 2.4.131-133). Lear does not know how to value *them*. "Hope" is an interesting choice of word. It suggests Regan's willingness to assume the best, or an optimism that Lear will change his judgments of value. Any optimism about the future must also be about how the future assumes value, how we judge it. Handicapped by his old-fashioned "bonds," and expected "dues," Lear cannot "value" Goneril's "desert."

Just as Lear holds to values that orient him to the past, Larry believes the capitalist incentive that hard work pays. There is little optimism in hard work, in inheritance and maintenance. His grandparents sought "the American promise, which is only possibilities," (Smiley 1991: 46), but Larry's farm expands due to discipline. Larry's father's generation removed the water from the soil and Ginny imagines the water as always ready to come back over the soil: "the sea is still beneath our feet, and we walk on it" (Smiley 1991: 16). Walking on those drained marshlands requires a sort of tragic

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daughter. He hopes that his youngest child will minister to him in his old age. Cordelia, in emphasizing her "bond," perhaps hopes that love confined within a set of formal social norms provide some sort of infrastructural screen against her father's demands (*Lr*. 1.1.93). How can she flourish as the wife of a nobleman if she must care for an aging father indefinitely?

optimism, which Ginny (the Goneril character) possesses. Larry's motto, "What you get is what you deserve" (Smiley 1991: 35), is the motto of the privileged; it also forecloses any need for optimism about the future. When you work hard, you *expect* the rewards. Larry's goal is expansion, "to buy more land" (Smiley 1991: 45). Meritocracy, of course, is one of the most cherished fantasies of capitalism: "All men are born equal...but the cream rises to the top!"[99]

The villains in the play, then, can project their hopeful emotions into the space left by the abandonment of those emotions by others. Each party—the good and the bad—believe they have vengeance on their side. Feeling is so heavy at the end of the play, the mood is so "cheerless, dark and deadly" (*Lr*. 5.3.289), that the present moment of time sinks into the ground. Only here do motives, the circumstances behind the moods of vengeance and hope, disappear as trifles. No one gets what he or she deserves because no one is innocent, no one is not a villain, no one can judge what those deserts would be. Larry, in particular, can deny circumstances, being at fault, by ignoring the past. Rose says, "Daddy thinks history starts fresh every day, every minute, that time itself begins with the feelings he's having right now. That's how he keeps betraying us, why he roars at us with such conviction" (Smiley 1991: 216). Both versions of *Lear* show us the inability of revenge yet the imperative of hope.

Hope for Ginny lies in children. Of course, what Ginny expects from children can never materialize. "I let myself, just twice, imagine a baby, a child who would turn all my miscarriages, and everything else, into good luck, whose birth, after the onset of self-knowledge (Daddy's, mainly, but ours, too), was timed for happiness" (Smiley 1991: 207). But the kind of future of another generation would only replicate the past: As Jess

[99] As the Henry Ford character says in *Ragtime* (2009).

(the Edmund character) tells Ginny, referring to his father and Larry, the older generation: “Oh, Ginny, they have aimed to destroy us, and I don’t know why” (Smiley 1991: 183). Instead of hope tied to a good future, the novel ends in an affirmation of the present: the anger we feel towards injustice existing side-by-side with an optimism that fills the present. Ginny finally leaves her husband and takes a waitress job in Minneapolis. She likes the fact that there is “nothing time-bound” about her new location and job: the cars on the adjacent interstate pass at all hours; “you could get breakfast, the food of hope and things to be done, any time” (Smiley 1991: 333). Here optimism can exist frozen in time. There is no future to hope for, at least not one that can be readily measured. “The noise was the same, continuous, reassuring: human intentions (talking, traveling, eating) perennially renewing themselves” (Smiley 1991: 333). By throwing herself into the continually fleeing moment, renewing itself indefinitely, Ginny shields herself from a change in her relation to optimism, the want of hope. She must finally face the fact of no children. Contrast this to Richard, whose optimism evaporates at the end as the object striven for (not children, but the crown) eludes him.

Ginny’s optimism, in the end, exists as a mundane, everyday thing, something below the radar of any set of intense feelings. If Ginny makes peace with the past to exist in an ever-recurring present, her father and her sister Rose latch on to anger as fuel for their revenge. But anger too can have its optimistic uses, as when Audre Lorde expresses hers: “I have suckled the wolfs lip of anger and I have used it for illumination, laughter, protection, fire in places where there was no light…” (Lorde 1984: 133). On her deathbed, Rose tells Ginny, “We’re not going to be sad. We’re going to be angry until we die. It’s the only hope” (Smiley 1991: 354). Anger, for Rose, gives hope because it is the

only way to avoid self-pity at being raped as a child, having cancer, being beaten by her husband, losing her farm. “The more pissed off I get, the better I feel,” Rose says (*Thousand Acres* 1997). Queen Elizabeth in *Richard III* similarly vents her angry words because “though what they will impart / Help nothing else, yet do they ease the heart” (*R3* 4.4.131-2). Unfortunately, the film gives this story more of a Hollywood ending, one that robs anger of its optimism. Ginny ends the film with: “my inheritance is with me in Rose's children. As each year goes by, I watch them grow. And in them, I see something new. Something my sister and I never had. I see hope” (*Thousand Acres* 1997). This is a heritage, the extension of time possibly into an eternity of family descent that we never got in *King Lear* (despite Lear’s early attempt to fix the future), but this optimism is empty and sentimental. Optimism is again located in the future, where it is much less tangible and much more conventional. The point of Smiley’s story is to rewrite the history of these women from their point of view, stuck forever in the hellscape of a patriarchal, hopeless history, where only an optimism of anger (or, in the movie, of children), can push them forward.

Jess/Edmund is by far the most optimistic of all characters. He reacts with vitality and elasticity to the failures of the older generation. He tells Ginny, “Everything will be fine. Life is good. Change is good” (Smiley 1991: 38). Taking this perspective brings a calm happiness, but it remains impossible for those attached to the land. This is what optimism looks like in Jess: a “fluid grace,” an “acceptance of change and movement that ran through him” (Smiley 1991: 230). By contrast, Ginny says it took “mere instants” for Ty, Pete, and Rose “to take possession in their own minds” when Larry raises the idea of giving them his land (Smiley 1991: 30). What being attached to the land takes away from

you is this breezy optimism attached to no time or place that Jess can inhabit as a wandering vagabond. Without the ability to mentally detach from the land, the only optimism Ginny can embrace is a bagatelle optimism of breakfast, “the food of hope and things to be done,” regrettably brief but always recurring (Smiley 1991: 333).[100]

Conclusion: Shakespeare’s Villains And American Optimism

According to recent research, Americans are among the happiest of countries’ populations around the globe (UN World Happiness Report cited in Rayman 2015).[101] Compared to people from other wealthy nations, Americans are more likely to rate their day as a "particularly good day" when asked (41%), compared to 21% in Germany and 8% in Japan (Pew Research cited in Poushter 2014). Optimism seems an essential part of the American Dream. Perhaps mirroring this optimism, Kevin Spacey describes his interpretation of Richard, in the 2012 Brooklyn Academy of Music production of *Richard III*, in terms of “overcoming,” likening him to the soldiers he visited at Walter Reed hospital returning from Iraq and Afghanistan who, when asked what they mean to do when they recover, all said they could not wait to return to their unit (cunytv75, "Theater Talk"). There are many reasons for this. It is not uncommon for war veterans, from any economic background, to long to return to the front (Morris 2015: 100). Many find civilian life so different that it is difficult to readjust.[102] But Spacey puts the highest gloss

[100] Ironically, on this Iowan farm in the 1980s, it is precisely what goes into producing this breakfast that kills Ginny and Rose’s hope. The way humans have abused the land, using pesticides to protect the crops, robs them of the future, as its leads to Rose’s cancer and Ginny’s miscarriages (drinking the well-water with runoff from the farm).

[101] Other studies, for example by the Gallup polling group (Gallup 2016) and the OECD (2015), rank the US a little lower but still relatively high.

[102] Movies, book and articles chronicling the veteran's hardships at readjusting to civilian life abound. For a moving example in film, see William Wyler's *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946). As the most decorated war veteran of WWII, Audie Murphy. said, “Things don’t thrill you anymore. It’s a struggle every day to find something interesting to do” (Murphy quoted in Morris 2015: 136). Thus, I do not think we need necessarily assume that these soldiers have so few options in their own communities and that this is what

on their desire to recover and to return to their previous lives, evidence of a positive mindset. For Spacey, Richard is a man driven to overcome:

> Overcoming the disability is what they set out to do, and I thought, that's exactly how I want to approach Richard. I want to be able to turn his disabilities into weapons, so that he is able to achieve things and do things that we might not expect he could do. … Just in terms of the psychology of understanding, how does someone overcome something that either they're born with or that happens to them through no fault of their own. I was very inspired by that, the notion of overcoming, and that was what ended up making, I wanted that [Richard's deformity] to be a weapon (cunytv75, "Theater Talk").

Here is overcoming—the quintessential American hope, to be better, to achieve more—translated into Richard's dream of achieving the crown. If Richard tries to overcome being stuck in a dull moment of complacency as a subject, overcoming the grossness of his disfigured body by exaggerating his commitment to piety, patriotism, his family line, making a great show of it to others, it is his outsider's perspective that he most slyly does not overcome; astute to the hypocrisies of his fellow schemers, he outwits them by pretending to be satisfied with the status quo, all the while working steadily against it. Richard is not in time with the world he inherits, the world that defers to those considered more worthy, and he seeks to overcome his now, to give his moment some velocity.

I have focused on Edmund and Richard in this chapter because of the way their structural attachments both hinder and enable them. As outsiders, they have been granted a special vantage on those attachments, a different moral perspective on society. Yes, they maintain attachments, attachments that Berlant would call cruel, that preserve their fantasies. But there is something laudable nonetheless in the way their optimistic moods enable them to challenge these structural obstacles. Through the techniques discussed elsewhere in this dissertation—namely acting and courage—they foster a mood that

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drives them to return. As the film *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* (2016) demonstrates, war can create adrenaline junkies.

dismantles organized barriers to their achieving a positive sense of selfhood. Both Richard and Edmund unravel the social threads that treat them unfairly. Both Richard and Edmund, although they fail, attempt to change the terms of estimation in which their life has been cast. To think of Edmund as a "bastard"; or Richard as a "deformed lump" (*III Henry VI* 5.6.51; see also *R3* 1.2.57); to think of either of them as a villain only: How can anyone think of a human being in the light of such terms? Motivated to fight against such injustice, their affective, personal moods go some way in changing what could otherwise be damaging optimistic structures of attachment.

Cruel optimism is a structural attachment Richard nurtures in others. For example, Buckingham lives in hope that Richard will reward him for his service. When Buckingham says he will claim his recompense, Richard says, "look to have it ["the earldom of Hareford, and all the movables / Where of the King my brother stood possessed"] yielded with all kindness" (*R3* 3.1.195). Richard does not say he will give Buckingham what he wants, only that he should keep himself in that relationship to cruel optimism, in other words, only that he should live in hope and "look" that it will happen. Buckingham wrongly believes there is a reciprocal relationship between them. Reciprocity, for Richard, would mean unthinkingly reproducing the coherency of the (old) world. He refuses, preferring instead to nudge a parsimonious mood into line with a steely, non-normative pragmatism: He tells Buckingham: "I am not in the giving vein [mood] today" (*R3* 4.2.119). Villains refuse to reproduce confidence in reciprocity. Of course, this may be a cause for our condemnation: It might pain us to see that Edmund betrays a father who so implicitly trusts him. But the mirage of reciprocity between villains and the world was destroyed long ago. Again, we must consider what the before-

the-play-began circumstances may be, and we get hints of these. At the start of the play, right in front of Edmund, Gloucester says how ashamed he has always been of his son (*Lr*. 1.1.9). We can then admire the villains for not getting attached to insensitive family members who devalue them.

Berlant says that the future is not "the primary lubricant for counter-normative political consciousness" (Berlant 2011: 68). She criticizes optimism's ever-onward quality. But for these villains, the future is the only place they can put their dreams for a different sort of life. Future-oriented optimism is what unshackles them and braces them for a more livable life. These villains reconceptualize the future and time itself. Berlant thinks that there is a certain experience of time specific to our neoliberal culture, and that cruel optimism is a structural imperative of our time. We maybe cannot fully refashion hierarchical structures by adopting a mood, but we might make progress toward eventually dismantling them. The actorly techniques these villains employ and the moods that drive them forward attempt to do just that. It is these villains' creative misrecognition of structuring, historical forces, the way they refuse customs of law that hold them back, that keep them in a position of inequality, the structuralisms that distort, isolate, and unfairly singularize their experience—it is this refusal that allows them to lean optimistically, passionately towards the next possibility, negotiating the landscape by feeling their way. Optimism can lead to material change. As antagonisms mount, as between Clarence and Edward, or between Gloucester and Cornwall, the villain unravels his own brand of affective entrapment. These villains refuse the scenes or acts already scripted for them, predictable conditions to endure. They take a crisis trickling onto the scene and put a magnifying glass to it, arranging and foregrounding it, making it

resonate. Whereas other characters desperately try to forestall despair—think of King Lear pleading "O, how this mother swells up toward my heart! / Hysterica passio, down, thou climbing sorrow!" (*Lr*. 2.4.54-55)—these villains make that despair their canvas. It is their experiential differences from others, which have shaped their affective bearing, that hinder them from ever "fitting in" but that set them instead toward a future fueled by their counter-normative fantasies.

Unlike the other characters in these plays, the villains are mood virtuosos: They can so easily become "affect aliens"—something my techniques for the democratic actor help nurture—because of their skills in slipping smoothly from one mood to another, gathering up an arsenal of masks to wear in different scenes, or as the genre changes. They are masters of adaptation. When a mood does not suit them, they either change it or organize it around the conditions of their own experience. Every event they can place on their (non-chronological) timeline ("All's meet with me that I can fashion fit" [*Lr*. 1.2.168]). Time for them emerges, there is no arc to their narrative, no logical unfolding of a present into a future. Thus, for them, *contra* Berlant, the future can be "the primary lubricant" for a counter-normative consciousness in large part because the future does not exist in linear narrative. The future is with them always, animating their present. Like Richard, Edmund came "into the world before he was sent for" [*Lr*. 1.1.20-21]—and there is some connection between villainy and untimeliness. They are out of time, not in the flow of the moving present, experience reality as strain. Their optimism fundamentally changes the visceral rhythms of their being. What they feel is calibrated according to the potency and impact of their actions. An achievement (e.g., killing a brother) generates a *felt sense* of achievement. They use the standards they set for

themselves, separate from inherited norms, to determine what feeling should follow a thought or action: happiness after killing off a rival. Their unredeemability lies not in their habits of personality but in their habits of affect. The present is temporally flexible, mediated through spectacularly labile affects. They embrace instability and precarity without solution or resolution because it feels like freedom. The world being upside down is the only setting in which they can rise. The clash of their affect with the general mood is a defining condition of their sense of success.

Vulnerability makes existence perilous in a world of power-grabs and scheming and continuous civil war. The similarity between Richard's world, or Lear's world, and 21th century capitalism—its dislocations, disruptions, casualties, failures—is one of degree, not kind. Facing exclusion or extinction, deemed sub-human, better to possess a bare-swept soul and to connive one's way onto the edges of the map of the humanly intelligible. Richard is the allegorical vice figure of morality plays, the Machiavel[103]—but it is a certain glee, an em(over)powering optimism, an all-out desire for power and belonging (belonging by way of making the rules of belonging) that negotiates the underlying one-dimensional coherence of his villainy. What can de-stabilize a nation stabilizes him. The dissolution of Lear's empire for Edmund, or of the stability of the English throne for Richard, releases energies for new patterns of order that serve our villains. But perhaps Richard is only as villainous as he is smart—smart to harden up the soft, vulnerable edges of his identity and mask or disavow any disquieting remainders. The pediment of his success is his actorly energy. These villains' inviolable resolve rests upon their optimism.

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103 Torrey notes how "Richard embodies several ways in which early modern England worried about duplicity" (Torrey 2008: 140).

In the end, when the future is no longer assured, when they have stretched the present beyond recognition, their fantasies, along with their optimism, die. Without a past, without having inherited anything, without a zone of comfort, only to glide on this dream-affect, they cannot survive. They cannot even *act* optimistic anymore. Their goals go unfinished, but that was never really the point. The present was the only time they had or wanted, but they confused it with a future that never arrived. They did not suffer the present in hope of future pleasure, or "scavenge enjoyment in a present beyond which there is nothing," as Berlant (2011: 221) and Ahmed's subjects do, but the thrill of their emotions blended the present and the future in their minds. That their future becomes "nothing" is not really important. In the time of their life, they *lived*.[104]

What does all this tell us about our dreams for a better politics? What are the political energies of this vitally affirmative mood in Shakespeare's villains? What can their mood do for our politics today? These villains use optimism to disrupt the normative political sphere. They envision with self-inflating intensity what an alternative life could be like when one is not afraid to challenge the terms in which one's life must be fit. One does not have to mimic or applaud the composure of evil to understand the benefits of such composure in the face of crisis: the courage to pry open the possibility of future flourishing by any means necessary, to invent new political possibilities by cultivating the visceral art of mood. The wayward energies in the moods of these villains manifest energies for a politically active, non-normative individualism unconnected to a

[104] As William Saroyan so memorably put it (Saroyan 1943). I speak in this chapter of both the historically specific time of neoliberal capitalism and the similar ruptures and uncertainties that Shakespeare's characters, in their historical time, experience. Time is not the same in every cultural setting, and I speak here not as Heidegger, for example, speaks of an abstract Time (Heidegger 2008), but I find the similarities between these times (Lear's time, Richard's time, our time) to justify my general argument about tragic optimism in what one might call "perilous times."

mainstream liberal individualism said to be vital to democratic participation.[105] Although optimism may be cruel, life without it is a submission to complacency, tradition, and obligation to a set of values utterly hateful to our freethinking villains.

Optimism may be a fantasy, but it does not have to be a normative one, it does not have to make living "compromised," in Berlant's terms (Berlant 2011: 24). If these attachments "organize the present" (Berlant 2011: 14), our villains teach us how optimism can also help us get unstuck from the present and go forward not linearly perhaps but multichronologically. Each way to the future passes through the gateway of optimism. The grieving or bitter characters—Lear and all the women of Richard's wrath—take pleasure in the dissipation of their energies, a disconnection from the rapid pacing of the positive emotions; their sadness is a ballast, anchoring us in the present moment, as Edgar says, so affectively weighty. They embrace the physical exhaustion of their bodies, their souls long dead. These villains, by contrast, remind us of the lack of complete innocence in any being in the world, and the importance of optimism in a restructured future without boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate, between favorite daughters and non-favorites, between servants and kings, between good guys and villains. If not for their optimism, these villains might harbor *ressentiment*, the reaction of the weak against their "well-bred" masters (Nietzsche 2007). Instead these villains point the way to alternative ways of living because they point the way to alternative ways of feeling.

[105] I would cite here, for example, in the liberal-communitarian debate, liberal arguments drawing on the individualism of Locke, Kant, most recently Rawls—writers who see individual agents as autonomous, rational decision-makers (Grant 1988; Nozick 2013; Doppelt 1989; Rawls 1999). Many deliberative democrats also assume this sort of political agent.

We could never assemble an etiology of their villainy, only guess that it seems a form of self-medication as they resist the structural inequalities of their times. These villains thrive in unstable, even shattered, environments, like war profiteers. They perform a persistent optimism without exhaustion, until their villainy becomes a world of its own, its anarchy—they follow not the sign of the Ursa Major—adopting a sort of mythical grandeur and godly prerogative, which is nothing but the creative license of the actor-director. Life is a project of continual reconstruction; existence is something to be employed to sustain their mobility. They are continually in a state of fragile disturbance, assembled for the experience of others, animated by their own internal mood. They change with and in the scenes they create; these villains magnetize a mass of moods that they then disperse noncoherently to confuse and fluster and disorientate. This is the optimism of villains, the optimism that could be ours.

Democratic overhearing: cultivating a 'third ear' and repartitioning the sensible

Introduction: conversations and democracy

In 1940, sociologist Paul F. Lazarsfeld and his colleagues observed the effect of mass media on voters (Lazarsfeld 2003). They found that political conversations were more influential than campaign items in the newspaper. Those they studied were more persuaded to change their mind about a candidate if they were caught unawares rather than if they planned to listen to a political speech. They wrote of one waitress influenced to vote for Roosevelt after overhearing the conversations of her customers:

> [S]he was in a position to overhear bits of conversation that were not intended for her. There are many such instances. Talk that is 'forbidden fruit' is particularly effective because one need not be suspicious as to the persuasive intentions of the speakers; as a result one's defenses are down. … [S]uch chance communication is particularly effective. … The respondents mentioned it time and again: 'I've heard fellows talk at the plant. . .I hear men talk at the shop. . .My husband heard that talked about at work. . .' (Lazarsfeld 2003: 15).

Overheard talk seems truer. The waitress (assumes she) overheard what was not intended for her, not packaged to her understanding or specific needs. This study was the first in a large wave of research demonstrating how interpersonal communication effects citizens' political behavior—research easily assimilated to a Habermasian communicative reason model. More recently, deliberative democrats like Seyla Benhabib worry that citizens must be exposed to a diverse set of perspectives, since, as some researchers claim, "[c]onversation is the soul of democracy" (Kim et al. 1999: 362), democracy "begins in human conversation" (Greider cited in Anderson, Dardenne, and Killenberg 1996: 13; Benhabib 2002). Healthy, robust democracies need communicative, participatory citizens. For Habermas, as for these empirical researchers, the circulation of words brings one closer to the truth as we exercise our rationality when arguing with others (Habermas 1990; Habermas 1984). Reflecting critically in public forums, individuals contribute to

the process of enlightenment. Within this tradition, the waitress was allowed to hear a truth that was circulating. Through free speech, there is a gradual accretion toward truth. Other liberties stem from this bedrock. Hearing and listening are the pillars of democracy as deliberative democrats like Habermas envision it (Habermas 1990; Habermas 1984; Bohman 2000; Dryzek 1990).[106]

Shakespeare shows us that this model is wrong. When words circulate, and especially when people *overhear*, the most likely results are intrigue and disruption. Tragedy often ensues. Overheard scenes add to the abundance and ambiguity of knowledge, interpretation, and meaning in a given play. It is no coincidence that *Measure for Measure*, one of Shakespeare's most controversial plays and perhaps the one most given to irreconcilable disagreement both within the play itself and in critical commentaries on it—as Harriett Hawkins writes, "So far as I know, there is no single interpretation of it that cannot be countered by a dialectically opposite interpretation" (Hawkins 1987: xi)—is also the play with an overheard sequence at the heart of the dramatic action.

I am not the first to recognize the disruptive potential of overhearing. This disruption need not be socially neutral but can acquire subversive, that is, specifically counter-hegemonic, qualities. Lauren Berlant notes that "To overhear the political, and to speak back from a position of not being addressed as the majority to be represented in it, is to seek to interfere with the feedback loop whose continuity is at the core of whatever normativity has found traction" (Berlant 2011: 249). If political conversation, the way Habermas imagines it, takes place between two subjects who can recognize each other

[106] For a critique of Habermas's account of communicative action as that which assumes "unproblematic hearing," see Levin 1989: 111.

within the dominant terms of subjectivity, and communicate with each other as equals (one must assume each dialogue partner's equality, Habermas believes; Habermas 1984), to overhear is to interfere with this circuitry. Properly hearing one another (hearing, that is, sanctioned by institutions and other grounds of the police order—which also includes *not hearing* some) gives us a consensus model of politics, but since overhearing is oblique, comes at the community of speakers from a sly angle, there is this disruptive potential. The impure act of overhearing is a renegotiation of the very terms of listening. One may not be interpellated into the normative social order. Overhearing, then, has the potential to reorganize the sense experience of two-way conversation.

The one who overhears flies beneath the radar, or over the radar, hovering beyond the modes of intelligibility that sanction certain communicative frames, forms, idioms and subjecthoods embedded in the cultural surround. Each subject is not interpolated as an equal subject of exchange that is knowable in advance because the circumstances within the scene of overhearing can easily change or undermine the epistemological certainties each hearer brings to the scene. Oftentimes, the overhearer actively reframes and interpretively refashions the exchange witnessed. Considering Rancière's notion of "the excess constitutive of politics" (Rancière 2006: 69), there is something excessive about overhearing: it doesn't always need to be heard. You overhear what is not meant to be heard by you. Words circulate freely "without a legitimating system," which can undermine the sensible order of what words mean (Rancière 2000: 91). Thus the overhearer can reconfigure the realm of the sensible.

Of course, in Shakespeare, sometimes eavesdropping leads to a clarification of matters. In *Love's Labour's Lost*, for example, the King and his lords overhear truthful

confessions and all consequently decide to pursue their love interests instead of keeping them hidden (*Love's Labour's Lost* 4.3). But in this chapter I will focus on scenes of overhearing that bring Habermasian assumptions about the nature of conversation into question. They do this in what I will call, following Rancière, democratic ways. Whereas Habermas (at least in an early version of *The Theory of Communicative Action* [1984]) posits the equality of speaking beings already formed in the social sensorium before entering into dialogue, a dialogue that takes places within the parameters of democratic institutions (even as it shapes those institutions), Rancière questions the very act of speaking—the Aristotelian *logos*, and how sound is (and *whose* sounds are) recognized. His idea that politics, and the moment(s) of disagreement it makes possible, involve a "contention over what speaking means" will help me make the argument that overhearing is a potential redistribution of the sensible (Rancière 1999: xi). The "democratic moments" in overhearing remind us that democracy is always messy. I first give a quick overview of some exemplary scenes of overhearing that demonstrate that overhearing often takes place where *logos* meets *phone*, where public meets private, but where the distinctions are anything but easy to decipher. Then I zoom in on *Measure for Measure*, a play in which one repressive order of things succeeds another with a rare glimmer of what Rancière would call politics.

Overhearing with a third ear: Othello, Troilus, and Polonius

The overhearer models what the theater audience, what readers, and what we as participants in the public sphere, do: listen to others without necessarily taking part or shaping that conversation. Nietzsche uses the term the "third ear" to capture what Shakespeare's overhearers manifest in great abundance: the ability to hear passionately

and sincerely (Nietzsche 1966: 182). To listen with a third ear would mean to possess a "real profundity of spiritual perception" (ibid., 190), to be alive to the tempo of a book, to "lend a subtle and patient ear to every *stoccato* and every *rubato*, [to] figure out the meaning in the sequence of vowels and diphthongs and how delicately and richly they can be colored and change colors as they follow each other…" (ibid., 182). Nietzsche notes that the ancients read like this—and they did so in the Renaissance too. Jane P. Tompkins has highlighted the long tradition in which meaning and signification are secondary concerns to how auditors sense rhythms and moods as they listen or read. The ancients viewed language "as a force acting on the world, rather than as a series of signs to be deciphered" (Tompkins 1980: 203). They speak in terms of the "intensity," "force," "irresistible might" of a text (ibid.). What makes texts visible in the first place is their effects, what Austin calls their perlocutionary force (Austin 1962). The perlocutionary dimension denotes what effect an utterance has on its hearers, how it might make people happy or sad to hear it, the affects it produces in others. Herein lies the fundamental uncertainty of all text or speech, for perlocutionary effect lies beyond the control of the speaker or writer.

What Nietzsche refers to as a "third ear," Bruce Smith describes as "hearing green" (Smith 2001). Hearing was held to be the primary sense in the Renaissance. Shakespeare's theater was an auditory theater: as Andrew Gurr notes, "Proximity to the source of the sound used to be the highest priority in the design of a theater" (Gurr 2012: 4). Hearing green involves listening *through and with the body* and "hearing the *totality* of sound, its extralinguistic as well as its linguistic components" (Smith 2001, 3.2, emphasis original). "[G]reen is not something that one sees; it is something one sees *with*.

It is an internal state of being" (Smith 2004: 150). This requires a subtler attention to what a text produces in its audience. Overhearers in Shakespeare usually have this "third ear," which means they hear too passionately, too sensibly, without regard to the normative frame of the conversation. Where Plato's ideal rational man would hear *logos* (see discussion in Rancière 1999), Shakespeare's overhearers hear passion, or affective circuits or currents.

In dramatizing the unreliability of visual (Othello's case) or auditory (Troilus's case) sense perception, Shakespeare invites us as an audience to ponder the surety of our own judgments—for we, too, are eavesdroppers. What we see or overhear can mislead us. This epistemological quandary indexes a broader problem without a solution, but one that is essential to grapple with in a democracy that prizes communication above all. Overhearing can reconstitute the terms and meanings of things around us, what is legible and perceptible and what is not. How we overhear is part of the production and possible transformation of the relational networks and beings involved in the encounter.

Overhearing involves intense feelings of passion. Take Othello. He has just come out of one of his epileptic fits (so in not too stable of a mental state) when Iago requests that he withdraw into the corner to listen patiently and restrain himself. In responding, Othello says, "Doth thou hear, Iago? / I will be found most cunning in my patience, / But—dost thou hear?—most bloody" (*Othello* 4.1.87-89). Othello's reply has the feel more of an initiatory remark than a response. Othello pathetically seeks confirmation that Iago hears him, as if trying to confirm that he himself possesses *logos*, rational speech to communicate, whereas it is Othello about to do the hearing. It is almost as if Othello resents being put in the (passive) position of a mere overhearer—he also seeks the agency

of one who is heard. Alas, Othello will be overcome by utterances that, on one hand, cannot make sense to him but, on the other, make too much sense in that they *produce* sense, plunging him into a state of murderous vengeance.

It is the gestures of the visible, and, most importantly, the "frame" that Iago sets up in which to contextualize those utterances and gestures, that serve to call Othello's madness into being. Iago says to himself, "As he [Cassio] shall smile, Othello shall go mad;" Othello will construe "Poor Cassio's smiles, gestures, and light behaviors / Quite in the wrong" (*Othello* 4.1.98-101). This is not simply a case of misinterpretation. Othello hears the same words that Iago and Cassio hear. The difference hinges on context, and the way the visual cues are received and digested. An utterance made by Cassio does not strike Iago and Othello in the same bodily way. The words are experiences first and foremost via Othello's heart, for example, whereas Iago's intellect tends to take the lead in registering the sound. The words effect Othello's sensations in a way quite different from their meaning as examples of *logos*. Language, knowledge, and sensation are interwoven. It is no coincidence that several eavesdropping scenes in Shakespeare concern a woman's virtue—with so many passionate emotions riding on the "truth" about the woman's loyalty, which can never been proven (*Othello* 4.1; *Troilus and Cressida* 5.2; *Much Ado About Nothing* 3.3).

As Martin Barker writes, "Facts adduced only look like evidence and arguments if you are already within that frame of reference" (Barker 2003: 74). Hence Iago's ability to "frame" Othello's mind. One doesn't readily suspect a "message" when one overhears, but others can stage a message unbeknownst to the listener. One can accordingly be more easily taken in. In Shakespeare's overhearing scenes, passionate transformations occur

when people listen, usually with frames or preconceptions of which they remain unconscious. Ironically, factual truths often fall out haphazardly, without logical threads connecting a series of events, therefore they seem less true than lies. Facts do not come with neatly packaged reasons; they are frustratingly contingent. As the early Christian philosopher Tertullian wrote, *certum est, quia impossibile est*, or "this is certain because it is impossible" (Tertullian quoted in Miłosz 1977: 108). Or, as Lucy Warriner (Irene Dunne) says in *The Awful Truth*, “there's nothing less logical than the truth” (*The Awful Truth* 1937). Once misperceptions colonize a majority of minds—as with misogynist beliefs about a woman’s fickle affections—the truth is clouded by judgments and beliefs that wear the authority of custom, and truth becomes impossible to discover.

Overhearing, then, becomes risky business in a realm in which the dignity and nature of truthfulness is distorted. The liar has latitude to fabricate his “facts,” catering to the expectations of his audience, or, as in Iago’s case, weaving his web of lies for his own enjoyment and gain. Thus, his lies are often more convincing, woven with more logical fabrics. The contingency and unexpectedness that plague real facts need not distress the liar. Deceptive Machiavels, like Iago, or like Stalin when he wrote Trotsky out of Soviet history books, play on the persuasive qualities of sequential events. The element of surprise disappears. Factual truth is never self-evident, though lies can be perverted to seem so. When Othello listens, he arguably is not shocked. Because of cultural stereotypes about women’s inconstancy, a culture in which being cuckholded is recognized as something shameful, coupled with Iago’s deceit, Othello’s mind is malleable and the “lies” seem to him much more believable than the facts.

Involved in Othello's deceit is an instance of what Rancière calls disagreement. Overhearing is only a moment of politics when there is a clash of contexts. As Rancière says, "Politics is not made up of power relationships; it is made up of relationships between worlds" (Rancière 1999: 42). The world comes first, then the subject. It is the world that gives subjects their definition: this is the case for Othello. The subjects who overhear and who are overheard are constituted by the act of overhearing: Othello becomes the jealous husband, the stock older husband figure, a cuckold. This situation or "world" is what I would call a context, the social conventions, networks, institutions, and surrounding environments that make noise into understandable words, and the context changes. *Politics happens because surplus subjects are created—and the overhearer is one.*

Disagreement is Rancière's name for a dispute that concerns the ground on which argument takes place, the world in which it exists. It is about "contention over what speaking means" (Rancière 1999: xi). But this contention stems, in part, from the difference in surrounding behaviors that constitute the utterance as meaningful in some way to the listeners (the perlocutionary force of the utterance, which is always different for each individual—and can be especially markedly different for overhearers). Key for my point here is Rancière's talk of the "*structures* proper to disagreement" (Rancière 1999: xii). "Disagreement clearly is not to do with words alone" (Rancière 1999: xi). It is about the field in which those words reverberate, the common stage on which disagreement happens.

The dissensus Rancière esteems is about the conditions or situation or structure around which speech and words are exchanged. These are the conditions that determine

perlocutionary force. Eavesdropping changes the context or structure around which words are heard—and this is why it is a redistribution of the sensible. Eavesdropping, in raising other suggestions as to the meaning of an exchange of words, initiates a struggle over meaning because of the different contexts or "worlds" involved. As Zivi notes, disagreement over words can reveal "the contradiction of two worlds in a single world: the world where they are and the world where they are not" (Zivi 2012: 92).

Othello hears the same words Cassio and Iago hear but they register differently for him because he has a different context for the words. For Rancière disagreement is over who is recognized as having *logos*, but he criticizes Habermas for assuming that, *a priori*, an intersubjective relationship will support, will provide the conditions for, mutual understanding. For Habermas, "linguistic pragmatics in general (the conditions required for an utterance to make sense and have an effect for the person uttering it) would provide the telos for reasonable and just exchange" (Rancière 1999: 44). But the conditions for mutual understanding are often nonexistent, especially in the case of overhearing in Shakespeare. Either one party desires to misrepresent the situation or epistemological limits simply force themselves upon the overhearer to the detriment of understanding. Overhearing disrupts the techne of representation, the regime of rigid mimetic duplication and hierarchy of ideal and real. This is because nothing can be communicated in its original form, and the changed context warps the message, destroying any hope of exact representation. Meaning is unfixed, speech is representative—one cannot represent something just as it is. Words change their signification depending on who hears, and this is especially true when overhearing

happens and there is a clash of worlds because of the different contexts or regimes surrounding the utterances.

Troilus, like Othello, reacts passionately to what he overhears despite no guarantee that he understands what he witnesses. His love is at high pitch, and the shock is proportional. Like Iago, the Machiavellian Ulysses urges Troilus to be a quiet, unobtrusive observer, and, like Othello, Troilus responds with, "I am all patience" (*Troilus and Cressida* 5.2.63). Again, as in the Othello plot, there is an object of romantic exchange (Troilus's sleeve) that becomes the nexus of conflicting emotions: desire, hate, jealousy, humiliation. Based on what he sees and hears, Troilus comes to believe that he knows with certainty that his lover's "mind is now turned whore" (ibid. 5.2.113-4). Once the "evidence" of her infidelity sinks in, Troilus begins raving. "O Cressid, O false Cressid! False, false, false," he shouts (ibid. 5.2.177-8). Shakespeare's characters often repeat words in his greatest tragedies—think of the final scene of *King Lear* ("Howl, howl, howl!" [*Lr.* 5.3.256])—which serves to wring out the pathos. Troilus makes a spectacle of himself and Ulysses tells him, "O contain yourself. / Your passion draws ears hither" (*Troilus and Cressida* 5.2.180-1). The scene calls attention to the interpretive uncertainty in spying on others' from a distance: they eavesdrop on Cressida as a scornful Thersites eavesdrops on them, just as we the audience eavesdrop on all, spawning a yawning gap of limitless regress. Perspectives multiply and it becomes difficult to synthesize them into a compatible whole. This epistemological confusion always accompanies overhearing scenes, serving to magnify a larger problem of the link between the perceptible and passionate listeners whose somatic changes disqualify them as neutral observers of "truth."

Further complicating matters, Harold Bloom says of Ulysses something that can be said of Iago as well: that he "says nothing that he believes, and believes nothing that he says" (Bloom 1998: 340). Ulysses and Iago drive a wedge between thought and speech intentionally, but there is always a gap between speech and thought (and between speech and signification) because every sound someone utters is always a representation. The misleading words of intrigue undo "the relationship between the order of words and the order of bodies that determine the place of each" (Rancière 1999: 37). Sounds are never attached to an unchanging essence that signifies the same thing in every situation. This is why, for Rancière, speech holds such importance for reconstituting given orders which keep subjects in fixed positions along the social hierarchy. Lying between a representation and how it registers is always the *representation* of that utterance: Rancière writes, "the *logos* is never simply speech, because it is always indissolubly the *account* that is made of this speech: the account by which a sonorous emission is understood as speech" rather than a simply incoherent babbling or *phone* (Rancière 1999: 22-23, emphasis original). Rancière uses this analysis to understand orders of domination as *sensory* orders. Because the listener is thrown into such a passionate, bodily state, overcome and sometimes paralyzed by his emotions, the overhearing scenes in Shakespeare call attention to the different sensory orders that sound can occasion—especially via faulty listening. Words are always also an *account* of those words, meaning that the assumptions we choose to take into account when we overhear (that Desdemona or Cressida is unfaithful, that Hamlet is a madman ready to kill his mother) shape the meaning of the words we hear.[107]

[107] For an outrageous example of this, consider *As You Like It*. Rosalind attempts to change the meaning of Phoebe's love letter to her by reading it as evidence of Phoebe's "giant-rude" cruelty (*AYL* 4.3.34). Silvius

When Rancière says that speech is always also an "account," then, we can take this to mean "interpretation" as well—as overhearers interpret what they are privy to. The blunt force of sound strikes them and they are overwhelmed by the "green," their third ear is too well-attuned. Smith likens hearing green to listening to a language one does not understand: "Speech in a language one doesn't understand seems so rapid precisely because the listener is hearing all the sounds coming out the speaker's mouth and not just the discrete phonemes that make sense in that language" (Smith 2001: 3.3). He adds, "Post-Cartesian understandings of the body attempt to "filter out" all non-semantic sounds" but the green cannot be so easily divided out (ibid.). Overhearing in Shakespeare reminds us that when *phone* meets *logos*, something strange happens.

The fatal overhearing scene in *Hamlet* is further instructive. Here again, we have a scene where a woman's virtue is possibly at stake. After telling the audience that he will "speak daggers" to his mother "but use none" (*Ham*. 3.2.366), Hamlet stabs Polonius. Listening behind the arras, Polonius gives himself away with his "What ho! Help, help, help!" after a distress signal from Gertrude as she fears for her life (*Ham*. 3.4.22). Polonius also lacks what Hamlet chides his mother for not having: ears with hands and eyes (*Ham*. 3.4.70.9)—a kind of prehensile, seeing "third ear." Nonetheless, Polonius, the eavesdropper, feels things as do Othello and Troilus—literally, the trust of Hamlet's sword. Polonius's overhearing is sanctioned by King Claudius, but eavesdropping as a way to understand one's subjects fails as a government policy maneuver because the overheard (in this case, Hamlet) might outsmart the eavesdropper

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interjects with confused questions as to Rosalind's reading of the text—"Call you this railing?" (*AYL* 4.3.43)—but Rosalind shows how the text affects *her*, in the process changing how the lines are read and understood. Rosalind reads the text as an extension of the disdainful character Phoebe has already demonstrated ("She Phoebes me" [*AYL* 4.3.39]). Another not-so-outrageous example is Helena's re-writing of Bertram's letter in *All's Well That Ends Well*.

by stating false information (e.g., Hamlet's faking madness) or the eavesdropper may not understand utterances correctly (e.g., Hamlet's intentions toward his mother). True meaning is inaccessible to the eavesdropper because one's hidden intentions go undiscovered. But it is misleading because the eavesdropper often *thinks* they have discovered hidden intentions.

For Othello, Troilus, and Polonius, overhearing effects what Rancière calls a "disidentification"—they become "mad," not like themselves (what literally happens to Othello with his epileptic fits), or, like Polonius, they die. Overhearing gives us another order of the sensible, as these words produce "a disidentificaiton, [a] removal from the naturalness of place" (Rancière 1999: 36). Even eavesdropping situations in comedic settings—in *Much Ado About Nothing*, for example—effects a change in character or, at least, in heart, when Benedick and Beatrice hear it said that they are loved by the other and then, after hearing this, decide to love the other in return. Here "words"—or in Othello's case, visible gestures—dislodge subjects from the places they formerly occupied, reshaping the sites of intelligibility. Overhearing gives us another order of the sensible.

The overhearer is often recreated by the language, forced to remake himself in light of the new information gathered and its effect on him. Here I wish to emphasize both the power-agency of language (the sonority-power versus purely semantic-power of language) and the act of self-remaking. Overhearing is often an event that produces a subject: the emancipated listener, as Rancière calls this subject. In the 20th Century, we often do not take seriously the idea that words do things. Habermas, for examples, emphasizes "conversation" and its meaning-production over the sounds of words

themselves (Habermas 1984).[108] But in the Renaissance, it was taken for granted that works would "bring pressure to bear on the world" (Tompkins 1980: 210)—hence the heated debates about the virtue or vice of the theater and the threat of imitation. Words were seen as able to inculcate or undermine civic virtue. The overhearer, just like the audience member, is influenced—more so than through "dialogue."

When one partakes in dialogue with another, it is possible to give a commentary on one's words—that is, to take care that they are accepted the way the speaker intends.[109] One can even take steps to ensure the success of one's argument. For example, by engaging in acknowledgment and response, a technique of persuasion, rhetorical moves such as *prolepsis* or *occupatio*, raising and responding to a counterargument before one's partner has an opportunity to raise it. This smoothes the way for one's point to be taken with less objections. One of the reasons why conversations overheard are assumed "truer"—why, for instance, the waitress so readily believed her customers as to Wilkie's abilities as president—lies in the inability of the speaker to make moves calculated to make their speech more believable. In short, it seems that there is less

[108] Jane Bennett and William E. Connolly (2002) have an excellent essay on the sonority-power of language that supports my point challenging Habermas here. They write: "For us…language is not only a matter of significations and failures of signification. It is also about sound, noise, and differential intensities or affects;" "Sonority can distract humans from what someone is saying and propel them to idiosyncratic associations and thoughts" (Bennett and Connolly 2002: 252, 253). Bennett and Connolly note, citing Deleuze and Guattari, that children are talented at making words vibrate in their mouths, meaninglessly, as non-sense. It is no coincidence that in the theater, vocal warm-ups always consist of letting words resonate and buzz on the lips and in the mouth to improve diction: "red leather, yellow leather," or "Moses supposes his toeses are roses"—said more to let the words resonate and delight in the sound rather than to express any meaning.

[109] Consider how in *As You Like It*, Orlando seeks to "direct" his words even to the point of fixing his own interpretation as the true one. Orlando tells the sourpuss Jacques to stop "marring" his verses by "reading them ill-favoredly" (*AYL* 3.2.238-9). Orlando seeks to stop Jacques from marring his poetry with his unsympathetic reading. In similar fashion, Rosalind attempts to change the meaning of Phoebe's words when she reads her love-letter as evidence of "cruelty" (*AYL* 4.3.31). This is reader response theory in practice. Silvius even interjects with confused questions as to Rosalind's reading of the text: "Call you this railing?" (*AYL* 4.3.43) Rosalind shows how the text affects *her*, changing how the lines are read and understood.

calculation involved in overheard scenes. Polonius believes Hamlet's overheard melancholic "To be, or not to be…" whereas he might not have believed Hamlet announcing publicly that he had the blues (*Ham*. 3.1.58).

I hope thus far I have indicated the radical implications of overhearing. Rancière faults Plato for naively believing that the movement and availability of words can be controlled and directed, their meaning contained and kept from "rogue" listeners or interpreters. In contrast, Rancière celebrates the quality of words that is beyond our greatest efforts at control, the mutability of our conventions of hearing, feeling, and seeing—something Habermas does not take adequately into account. Overhearing gives evidence of our lack of control, by intercepting words, interrupting their context, taking speech out of the narrow world in which utterances are being heard by those they are directed towards and those hearers only. The "wrong" people can get hold of words not intended for or directed towards them. Overhearing can position subjects in unusual relationships to dominant modes of understanding. Overhearing a scene brings a whole new set of conditions on those utterances—as the original conditions required for the words to be understandable and have effect change. The overhearer need not—often cannot—submit to the conditions of validity set up by the original conversants in order to give grounds for mutual understanding.

Overhearing as Trigger for Democratic Politics in *Measure for Measure*

Before I turn to the play I will examine in some depth, *Measure for Measure*, I should briefly address a popular understanding of overhearing in Shakespeare put forth by Harold Bloom in *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (1998). Bloom's fascinating thesis is that "self-overhearing" is the path to autonomous individuality of

character in Shakespeare.[110] He argues: "In Shakespeare, characters develop rather than unfold, and they develop because they reconceive themselves. Sometimes this comes about because they *overhear* themselves talking, whether to themselves or to others. Self-overhearing is their royal road to individuation" (Bloom 1998: xvii). Characters revise their sense of self over the course of a play through overhearing themselves. But I want to highlight how, although overhearing the self can function to push an individual to take stock and reassess, overhearing others can form subjectivity or "subjectivate" (to use Foucault's term to describe the subject in relation to norms and authority; Foucault 1995) in no less powerful ways. What is most interesting to me about overhearing others is that it takes place at the cusp of the public and the private (even if it is typically figured as private, insofar as overhearing is associated with the illicit, the hidden, the intimate). Michael Warner contrasts "circulating forms of public address" with poetry that is "read as overheard" (Warner 1999: 81, 85). In the former, there exists "an awareness of the distribution of speech" that is always lacking in the latter (ibid., 85). But I would further distinguish between what is read and what is heard as "overheard": the latter has even greater power. For Warner, the private does not have much potential disrupt the hierarchical order of things and "bring into being realms of subjectivity," new "vocabularies of affect, styles of embodiment" outside the normative" (Warner 1999: 58, 57). Shakespeare shows how an attention to overheard speech, which collapses the distinction between public and private, brings to the fore the new modes of subjectivity.

[110] I wish it to be clear as well my rejection, following Rancière (1999), of this liberal model of the subject who precedes political actions. There was no model of the rational, autonomous, ultra-distinct self in the Renaissance—selves were seen as permeated by feelings and sense and words—despite what Bloom argues (Bloom 1998).

Shakespeare's plays often contest the common belief that what is overheard is more "truthful." Overhearing is often deceptive in one way or another—either we misrecognize the words and jump to untoward conclusions (like Polonius, Othello, perhaps Troilus) or we stumble upon a scene (as the Duke of *Measure for Measure*, for example, undertakes disguise explicitly for the purpose of overhearing). In this play, at the end, the Duke seems to wangle something resembling law and order out of a mass of deception and scheming. This is truth built on a lie, a truth cocooned within a lie: The dramatic resolution scene at the end, where hidden truths come to light, hinges on this one overheard scene. Disguise and fakery and play-acting, paradoxically, leads to a greater truth. Disguise even rectifies past mistakes: "So disguise shall, by th' disguised, / Pay with falsehood false exacting, / And perform an old contracting" (*MM* 3.1.500-502). A falsehood perpetrated on another falsehood allows the contract to be fulfilled. Marriage—this communal tie—is cemented through deceit. Bernice Kliman notes the importance in this play of deciphering "between a lie for gain and a lie to advance the truth" (Kliman 2012: 150). In other plays, lies are destructive, but in *Measure for Measure* Shakespeare shows us the necessity of lies to hold together a community.

In *Measure for Measure*, the act of overhearing in itself does not repartition the sensible to create what Rancière calls "politics," freeing subjects from social purpose, function and place (what Rancière calls "the police order;" Rancière 2000). I do, however, argue for the connection between the two, because overhearing makes Rancièrean politics possible in this play. Against what the police order dictates as to what can be seen, heard, and done, the overhearer disassembles this partition of the legible and illegible. What happens in the final scene of *Measure for Measure*, when Isabella makes

claims on the community in which she declares herself to be a part, is a democratic moment—a moment just as democratic and perhaps more so than most of the moments happening today under our so-called democratic governments. I follow Rancière in separating a so-called democratic regime from democracy, which are practices, "singular and precarious acts," in which equality is verified, practices that interrupt ostensibly democratic regimes (again, "police orders" for Rancière): "the laws and institutions of formal democracy are appearances under which, and instruments by which, the power of the bourgeois class is exercised" (Rancière 2006: 97, 3). If democracy is not a regime but rather a force (it is never something *we live in*), then its elements can exist in any historical structure of government. Shakespeare lived in a police order, according to Rancière, but so do we. Rancière would see our governments on a continuum—different *in degree* but not terribly much *in kind*. As Rancière says, there are better and worse police orders.

Instead Rancière's concern is with equality embodied in "concrete life and sensible experience" (Rancière 2006: 3). When I refer to democracy in this dissertation, I consider it an assemblage, a relational network of and between ideas and forces, and the value I most privilege in this assemblage is equality. Democracy is neither simply a set of values (Brettscheider 2006) nor a practice (Zivi 2012), but rather democracy is a practice that engenders and reimagines those values every time it is practiced. I follow agonistic democrats like Rancière (1999), Honig (1993), and Mouffe (2000) in associating democracy with conflict. Conflict and equality work hand in glove: as Adam Phillips writes, "Equality is the legitimation, if not the celebration, of conflict" and this is primarily due to the fact that "Conflict that is not between equals ceases to be conflict

very quickly" (Phillips 2002: 11, 12). It becomes intimidation and cowering, domination and obeying. True democracy is a felt space without those who know "better," the experts or general authorities who tell others how the world works. But democracy, importantly, is also not "a world upside down" if that means there is still solid ground under our feet, with those formerly on the bottom of the social ladder now occupying the top positions, because democracy is without positions at all—for to have any place at all in any order would be to just another instance of "police logic." Instead, democracy entails being comfortable with placelessness. Importantly, democracy can be seen in moments of conflict and disagreement over words during this final scene.

Although the act of overhearing (when the Duke, in disguise, hears Isabella tell her brother the proposition the new ruler Angelo has made to her—demanding her virginity for her brother's life) itself is not a moment of politics in this play, it is this act of overhearing that ultimately leads to "the sudden revelation of the ultimate anarchy on which any hierarchy rests," the paradoxical revelation that for there to be ruler and ruled presupposes the equality of the ruler and the ruled, the ability for each to hear and communicate with the other, to recognize *logos* coming from their mouths (Rancière 1999: 16). A part of the political order is claimed by Isabella, a woman Rancière would say who has no part in that order but who speaks as if she does. Here, it is because the Duke has overheard the previous scene and believed, then, that Isabella spoke the truth that he is able, now, to believe she is truthful in proclaiming Angelo's dishonorable intentions (though she in fact lies—on the advice of the Duke). In this play, which seems to veer towards tragedy and comedy but fly below the level of both, it seems that the truth needs the motor of a lie to circulate as truth, to gain recognition as truth. The play in fact

turns on the overheard scene, as the Duke gathers information from his people through the medium of disguise.

The scene in which Isabella exposes Angelo is full of the excess of words—a phrase Rancière uses to refer to the uncontrollability of language by human beings. This excess is a disordering principle, a force that threatens the police order, interrupting the relation between the proper arrangement of words given by the police order and words' functions (Rancière and Panagia cited in Chambers 2013: 116). Chambers notes that no philosophy of order, not Plato's, not Habermas's, can prevent or control "the excess of words": "politics requires, calls upon, and paradoxically also brings about, an excess of words" (Chambers 2013: 91). First, we hear Isabella's own excess of words: her emotional vowels ("O royal Duke!" "O worthy prince" "O worthy Duke") underlie her fervent will to expose how she has been "wronged" (*Measure for Measure* 5.1.20, 22, 28, 21).[111] Smith tells us that "o is the most intense vowel sound in English: it strikes the ear more forcefully than other vowel sounds" (Smith 2004: 166).[112] There is also an excess of words from observers like Lucio, who is told to shut up numerous times but fails to submit to silencing. In discussing a moment of democratic politics from the 18th Century, Rancière writes, "Women were excluded from the benefits of having citizens' rights in the name of a division between the public and the private sphere. In belonging to the domestic sphere, hence to the world of particularity, they were foreign to the universality of the citizen sphere" (Rancière 2006: 60). There is a certain partition of the perceptible

[111] References to *Measure for Measure* are hereafter abbreviated as *MM*.
[112] These pre-verbal O's are Isabella's passageway to subjecthood. She finds herself situated as an intelligible being through these fluid, emotional cries. Her intelligibility as a woman is a product of language, which precedes her. A wonderful way to describe this coming-into-being-through-*phone*/*logos* (for it is impossible to distinguish between Isabella's political request—*logos*—and her cries as indexing her emotional wounds—*phone*) would be as a moment of politics, "the unstable state and instant of language wherein something which must be able to be put into phrases cannot yet be" (Chambers 2013: 112). Moreover, there is no way to distinguish *logos* and *phone* here.

that separates speech from noise in the same way the public and its citizens are separated from the private and the unaccounted-for. Men in the public sphere have historically made the rules governing women's "appearing," deciding what can be counted and recognized as discourse and what is simply noise. "There is a mode of being-together that puts bodies in their place and their role according to their 'properties,' according to their name or lack of a name, the 'logical' or 'phonic' nature of sounds that come out of their mouths" (Rancière 1999: 27). This is especially applicable to women, who have been seen historically as "hysterical" and "overly emotional" and hence not worthy of being understood as sensical, speaking beings.

In order to force her male listeners to pay her heed in an environment that must have been terrifying to her, Isabella kneels (showing the bodily signs of requesting leave to be heard and believed) and repeats her words in a futile effort to make them register a certain way (i.e., maybe if she says the word "justice" enough times, she will actually receive it). This is a play very concerned with the way words effect others, their perlocutionary force, and how this force is distorted when passion effects the hearers or the speakers. Klimen notes that Isabella sometimes fails to say what she means, and Isabella herself says that "It oft falls out / To have what we would have, we speak not what we mean" (*MM* 2.4.118-9).[113] She does not mean necessarily that our desire gets the better of us and usurps the "meaning" of our words, but that there is always a gap between meaning and motives, or intentions. It is hard for our spoken utterances to align perfectly with our thoughts, especially with the added pressure that those words have a certain meaning for the listener (which we cannot control). Her brother speaks of her

[113] Whereas for Isabella this seems unintentional, Angelo brags, in more sinister fashion, "I can speak / Against the thing I say" (*MM* 2.4.59-60).

"prosperous art / When she will play with reason and discourse" (*MM* 1.2.161-2), her persuasive skills. This hint that Isabella can "play with" her words foreshadows how she repartitions the sensible in the final scene. "Playing with reason" seems a way to make one's listeners "hear green," hear more than the rational, and it is telling that, when first trying to convince Angelo to free her brother, Isabella asks him to get in touch with his senses: "Go to your bosom, / Knock there, and ask your heart what it doth know…" (*MM* 2.2.136-7). Unfortunately, Angelo becomes more like a lover whose hearts knocks him down as he undergoes a passionate transformation as he listens to her. The nature of *how* we hear affects us—disinterestedly, passionately, rationally—and Angelo (perhaps like the Duke when he overhears Isabella and her brother and maybe then and there decides that he wants to marry her) hears the same way Othello and Troilus do. All three hear green.

But when Isabella first comes on the public scene, it is she who seems overwhelmed with emotion. Give me "justice, justice, justice, justice!" she demands; "Hear me, O hear me, hear!" (*MM* 5.1.25, 32). These outbursts lead Angelo to say, "My lord, her wits, I fear me, are not firm" (*MM* 5.1.33). Isabella then proceeds to mock Angelo's words, almost mimicking him. When he warns the Duke, "she will speak most bitterly and strange," she responds, "Most strange, but yet most truly, will I speak. / That Angelo's forsworn, is it not strange? / That Angelo's a murderer, is't not strange? / That Angelo is an adulterous thief, / An hypocrite, a virgin-violator / Is it not strange, and strange?" (*MM* 5.1.37-42). The anaphora and repetition of "strange" five times give her speech an insistent, poetic quality. In the syntax of her emotion, she affectively redescribes the habits of Angelo's transgressions, rendering his authority vulnerable. Her

insistent repetitions signal an excess of words that democratically disrupts the given partition of the sensory realm, repartitioning it, remaking it. She supplements and unsettles the available structures of feeling in the state's social imaginary. The Duke somewhat comically doubles her by saying, "Nay, it is ten times strange!" (*MM* 5.1.43), but then marks her speech as incomprehensible and not worth the listening when he says, "Away with her. Poor soul, / She speaks not in th'infirmity of sense" (*MM* 5.1.47-8). Her words are inaudible. This is *phone*, not *logos*, he tells the crowd. But she perseveres until he begins to credit her spoken words differently. "Her madness hath the oddest frame of sense," he admits (*MM* 5.1.61). Perhaps learning her lesson from her previous failed attempts to conjure more "heart" in her listeners, or "play with reason," she now asks the Duke to listen with reason: "do not banish reason / For inequality"—by which she means, the inequality in rank between myself and Angelo, or you, or between what I say and what *seems* truthful (*MM* 5.1.65-6). The norms of legitimacy would discredit her speech as that of an hysterical woman. But here the logic of equality confronts the order of domination—and Isabella conjoins them. Her speech both renders that order visible—Angelo's tyranny—and renders intelligible the woman—herself—who was previously unintelligible. Whereas before she was excluded from the field of the sensible, the perceptual, her words inaudible, now her voice is recognized, her presence made visible. She is no longer beyond the limits of Viennese perception. She speaks of her submission to authority, admitting dependency, even as she challenges the status quo: as Karen Zivi writes, "Sometimes refusing what we are requires that we acknowledge what we have been understood to be" (Zivi 2012: 88). She expands our conceptions of womanhood, stretches the boundaries of the socially intelligible, demanding to be recognized as

neither saint nor whore (the two categories into which women are partitioned in *Measure for Measure*'s Vienna).

The word "strange" would resonate in telling ways to Shakespeare's contemporaries: as meaning "unknown, unfamiliar," but also "difficult to take in or account for; queer, surprising, unaccountable" and "having the feelings alienated" ("strange," *OED*, 7, 10a, 11a). For Rancière, moments of politics are also moments of surprise, moments that defy attempts at prediction (Chambers 2013: 5). Shakespeare uses "strange" in these senses in other of his plays. Isabella brings into being a new, "strange" order of the sensible for this moment. Not because the man in power has fallen (again, Rancière is clear that turning the world "upside down" is not necessarily politics) but because he is seen, perceived, and heard differently.

Critics often lament Isabella's lack of freedom in this play, the way she is controlled by the Duke and becomes, at the end of the play, "a shadow of her former articulate self" (Riefer 1987: 132; Cox 1983; Cacicedo 1995; McLuskie 1985). But when she accuses Angelo in public, although she is doing as she is told by the Duke, she exhibits a courage unparalleled by many of Shakespeare's heroines. Isabella is brave to accuse Angelo at a time when just defending a woman's virtue in public already condemned her as a whore for venturing out in public in the first place. This is a moment of politics for Rancière because "Politics has no 'proper' place nor does it possess any 'natural' subjects" (Rancière 2001: par. 25). "A demonstration is political not because it takes place in a specific locale and bears upon a particular object but rather because its form is that of a clash between two partitions of the sensible" (ibid.). Although there is no guarantee that her utterance will be understood or even acknowledged, in speaking *as if*

she were a protected subject of the political order, Isabella resignifies what it means to be a Viennese woman.

When Lucio jumps in to confirm her story, the Duke silences him: "You were not bid to speak," and, later, "you are i'the wrong / To speak before your time" (*MM* 5.1.78, 86-7). The Duke has been rightly likened to a "writer/producer/director" of his own carefully crafted play (Riefer 1987: 134). He seeks to posit an order of the sensible in his ideal image. The Duke "will lie right and left…merely for the sake of squeezing the last drops of drama or melodrama from the situation" (Goddard 1987: 31). As a disguised friar, overhearing others and unable to respond (this must have been especially frustrating when Lucio slanders him to his face), the Duke now compensates for his former lack: he imposes an order, partitioning silence and speech. He insists that Lucio know his place. This is a police order that regulates "right" and "wrong" speech, the "right" and "wrong" time and place for discourse, audible subjects and those without a voice.

Isabella maintains that although the Duke may feel her words to be "madly spoken," her words are "to the matter," i.e., appropriate and reasonable (*MM* 5.1.88, 9). She challenges the Duke's power to partition the sensible and divide *logos* so easily from *phone*. Cultivating a third ear, hearing green, means being attuned to *phone* and *logos* both. Nietzsche is a theorist who continually invites his readers to hear green. As John Hamilton notes, for Nietzsche, "rational language, which is based on fixed identities and conventional agreement, belongs to the herd" (Hamilton 2008: 208). The Duke wants to hear Isabella's language as "rational," but it keeps getting clouded over by the non-rational. This is why Rancière calls attention to the "duality of the *logos* as speech and account of speech" (Rancière 1999: 43). The Duke's account of Isabella's speech paints it

as *phone*. But no one can make a "choice between the enlightenment of rational communication" and what Rancière calls "the violence of the irrational" (ibid., 43). These are false alternatives.

Isabella, as noted above, repeats her words. Her efforts at being understood, and her ultimately perplexing silence at the end, confirms Nietzsche's observation that "Our true experiences are not at all garrulous. They could not communicate themselves even if they tried: they lack the right words. We have already gone beyond whatever we have words for" (Nietzsche 1990: 66). This is what Rancière terms "mute speech," a phrase meant to indicate the difficulty of giving an accurate rendering of things in words, and also the lack of things existing in already determined places in a hierarchy (Rancière 2011). Words cannot place the objects of our world in immutable positions: hence the political power of language to change our ways of doing and being and speaking. This is why cultivating a third ear entails so many democratic possibilities—communication through bodies, combining both noise- and reason-based exchange. It is when we hear words differently that they disrupt the logic of the police order, the old rigid order of experience and perception. Of course there is a risk this listening can lead to an outcome like Othello experiences: overcome with the passions, hearing too much green. But the risk is worth the consequences. There is more life, energy and dynamism in hearing green.

Sara Kofman captures the complexity of Nietzsche's third ear very well: listening with a third ear means "understanding" "without demanding logic or demonstration, without attempting to 'unveil' truth" (Kofman quoted in Vitanza 1997: 167). Listening to the tempo or pitch of sounds may distract us from the meaning of the words, but this

distraction is part of a richer listening process. Psychoanalyst Theodor Reik, in his book *Listening with the Third Ear* (1948), distinguishes between conjecture and comprehension. In overhearing, there is—must be—much conjecture. This is what Iagos take advantage of. Reik explains that, when doctor listens to patient, "social sense and rhythmic sensitivity are inseparable. … To say the right thing is largely to say it at the right moment" (Reik paraphrased in Arnold 2006: 755). But when one overhears at the "wrong" moment, this is when either tragedy ensues, or possibilities take root. For Reik, rational thought must eventually step in so that comprehension can occur, but I do not think Nietzsche would have us make that choice.

Nietzsche does speak of understanding when he speaks of the third ear, which indicates rationality at work in deciphering meaning, but he prizes both "art and purpose" (Nietzsche 1966: 182). Rationality is not the arbiter Reik would make it. To appreciate artful language requires "a subtle and patient ear" (ibid.). Nietzsche takes pride in his own swashbuckling with words: according to him, he "handles his language like a flexible rapier, feeling *from his arm down to his toes* the dangerous delight of the quivering, over-sharp blade that desire to bite, hiss, cut" (Nietzsche 1966: 183, my emphasis). Words for him are bodily; they do things both to them that wield them and to those that feel their force, dangerous things, but the audience must be receptive to appreciate their full power, and this is what Nietzsche laments among his contemporary Germans. There are both pros and cons to Nietzsche's approach to language, the approach of the ancients. Having a third ear upsets the order of things, renders strange what previously was assumed, makes Brummagem out of the once-genuine, translates confusion out of the once-obvious, generates a farrago of seeming absurdities out of the

once-serious. Nietzsche aspires to a language that will "grow into German hearts" (Nietzsche 1966: 184). The consequences are impossible to foresee.

Isabella declares a "wrong"—telling the public she has given her virginity to Angelo in exchange for her brother's life—and although this is a lie, in doing so, she defamiliarizes traditional ideas of womanhood. Women are either associated with brothels (like Mistress Overdone) or the convent (as Isabella herself once was). In declaring herself neither, Isabella challenges the ways in which the city (the Duke and Angelo) makes womanhood intelligible in exclusionary ways. In a more literal way, Mariana does this as well when she rejects the labels of wife, widow and maid all the while refusing to show her face (*MM* 5.1.170+). She is literally not visible because she refuses to locate herself within traditional female identity categories. Isabella's story of rape by Angelo, which she tells in public, makes visible current power relationships between men and women, citizen and non-citizen, while at the same time reimagining these relationships with her words. Although Isabella's efforts at persuasion seem to fail—the Duke dismisses her with, "thou know'st not what thou speak'st," her story "imports no reason" (*MM* 5.1.105, 108), lacks *logos*—she shares her experience and invites others to perceive the world around her as she has, a patriarchal world in which women are subordinated, abused, and not believed.

Also, in declaring a "wrong," she places the "wrong" in a common world that both she and her "betters" share. She enables democracy by making possible a clash/coming together—both a division and a gathering together—of worlds. The no-count (Isabella) "reconstitutes community by placing a wrong in common that reveals 'the contradiction of two worlds in a single world: the world where they are and the

world where they are not'" (Rancière quoted in Zivi 2012: 92). Isabella creates a common stage for both oppressor and oppressed, even as that vertical hierarchy flattens out in the moment of politics she calls forth.

Isabella anticipates a disastrous reception in public. After Angelo prepositions her, she wonders aloud, "To whom shall I complain? Did I tell this, / Who would believe me?" (*MM* 2.4.171-2). Any "reasonable" person would stay silent about the injustice, Angelo assumes (*MM* 4.4.24). The police order has already set up an order of speech and the visible, an order that was not a bit disrupted when the Duke left and was replaced by Angelo. It is Angelo's place in that order—and the reputation that follows from that place—that make her words nonsensical. Although Isabella at first threatens Angelo, her language is telling. "[W]ith an outstretched throat I'll tell the world aloud / What man thou art" (*MM* 2.4.153-4). There is something grotesque here. The somatic, anatomical focus on her "throat" already aligns her words with a mere animal making noise. Both animals and humans have throats, but humans, to be understood, must have more. Angelo stands as "the voice of the recorded law" (*MM* 2.4.61) whereas Isabella possesses a mere throat. He responds to her threats with reference to "my place i'th' state" (*MM* 2.4.156); his lofty subject position will assure that his location in the hierarchy stays put. Angelo has already defended his reputation by slandering another woman, his betrothed Mariana, when she lost her fortune, and here he threatens to do the same to Isabella. Women are passive subjects to the order of the sensible set up by the rulers of Vienna. Reputation is an order of the sensible, an invisible yet very real frame that structures lives. Angelo's reputation even leads him to take certain actions—ordering Claudio's death—that accord

with this frame of reference. What Isabella does in the final scene is shatter that rigid grid, disrupt the order of the sensible by which she is understood (or not understood).

While traditionally, it is rulers who get to decide whose speech is considered intelligible and whose not, the Duke's speech, while disguised, itself comes under question. While overhearing others, the Duke is invisible, outside the order of the sensible—although this is his choice. When he disappears from view, he gives up the privileges of intelligibility. Often the Duke says one thing and does another, leading to confusion in those with whom he interacts. As the Duke tells an unbelieving Provost, "Put not yourself into amazement how these things should be. All difficulties are but easy when they are known" (*MM* 4.2.186-8). The Duke is aware of his changeable ways; as he tells Friar Peter, "hold you ever to our special drift [purpose] / Though sometimes you do blench [swerve] from his to that / As cause doth minister [serve]" (*MM* 4.5.4-6). When the "cause" swerves, so does the effect. The Duke's "special drift," which drifts under the public eye as that which passes show, that which is private and inaccessible, is ill-matched with the steady flow of public affairs, which must seem orderly and logical. As Escalus notes, "Every letter he hath writ hath disvouched other [repudiated the others]" (*MM* 4.4.1). Angelo seconds this with, "In most uneven and distracted manner. His actions show much like to madness" (*MM* 4.4.2-3). The Duke seems to have no constancy of mind.[114] Is it really for him to say that Isabella makes no sense? But there is no one to put the Duke in his place.

[114] I would suggest that a main reason for the Duke's seeming madness, his inconstancy of mind, may be that he overhears private truths that change his public plan of action. If facts are not logical, if they do not fall into a common-sense sequence, neither do all of the secret facts the Duke becomes privy to. It is easy to keep to the structured advance of public activities when the private unexpectedness of secret events are kept from one's knowledge.

In contrast to overhearing scenes where the overhearer is in a position of weakness, listening with preconceptions planted in their mind by others (i.e., Iagos, or the general misogynic view that assumes women are more inconstant and changeable in their affections than men—which would "explain" both Desdemona and Cressida), the Duke is in a god-like position as overhearer. The Duke goes about unseen eavesdropping on others and this allows him to learn everybody's secrets. As Katharine Maus observes, "English Renaissance writers associate power that takes the form of invisible omniscience not only with God with also with the machiavel who denies God even while appropriating his attributes. Both characteristics have been accorded the Duke by different critics, and each receives some support in the play" (Maus 1995: 178). G. Wilson Knight reminds us that Angelo compares the Duke to the "power divine" (*MM* 5.1.361) and argues, "The Duke, like Jesus, is the prophet of a new order of ethics," representing "a perfected ethical philosophy joined to supreme authority" (Knight 1930: 88, 91). This reading, I am afraid, gives the Duke too much. After all, the play does not end in a better place than it starts. It is merely an interlude, without a solution to the problem the Duke sets out to solve at the beginning: sexual license in the city. Rules are still not being followed at the end, and it seems doubtful that the laws will be enforced with greater severity given that the Duke cannot even sentence the murderer Bernadine to death because Bernadine refuses. Whereas when Othello and Polonious overhear, tragedy ensures, that is clearly not what happens here. Just the opposite: tragedy is averted by the Duke's overhearing.

What makes the Duke God-like is this omniscient quality, his ability to overhear everything. Of course, we overhear everything in light of our own emotions, hopes,

anxieties. There is always a frame of reference. I here want to draw on a tradition of thinking about reading as a way to create meaning in order to better understand overhearing as repartitioning the sensible (de Certeau 1995; Mailloux 1982; Iser 1972). While the end of the play concludes with a continuation of the police order, the Duke's overhearing and interception, his decision to recognize Isabella as a speaking being with *logos*, also includes or highlights the moment of politics that Isabella brings forth (and quickly vanishes).

The Duke's Resistant Overhearing

The way Rancière describes the police order shares much with the way Adorno describes the machinations of the culture industry: everything is manufactured "more or less according to plan….ordering themselves into a system almost without a gap" (Adorno 2003: 55). The culture industry is a policing system. Subjects are counted "according to plan" with the impossible aim that there are no "gaps," no remainders or supplements. As Rancière says, "our governments take great care to banish the democratic supplement"—to depoliticize citizens so that "experts can quietly agree amongst themselves" (Rancière 2006: 81, 82).[115] This leads Rancière to lament what passes for politics today: "the logic of the consensual order" (ibid., 92)—the fact that voting has come to simply signify agreement with the government's decisions, a so-called politics where everyone agrees. Sadly, people just choose between oligarchs when they go to the polls; decisions depend upon experts and not popular choice (ibid., 78). This leads to "the consensual forgetting of democracy" (ibid., 92). We become a society of uncritical yes-sayers, eroding the possibility for a democratic politics.

[115] We might also figure the overhearer as supplement. Politics makes possible an alternative way of counting to the police order's math, one that might include the overhearer.

Adorno paints consumers of the culture industry as passive children, easily influenced by what they hear or see. "The power of the culture industry's ideology is such that conformity has replaced consciousness" (Adorno 2003: 59). The future of democratic society hangs in the balance: The cultural industry "impedes the development of autonomous, independent individuals who judge and decide consciously for themselves. These, however, would be the precondition for a democratic society which needs adults who have come of age in order to sustain itself and develop" (ibid., 60). This model of consuming does not leave much room for what Michel de Certeau describes as resistance, fugitive reading, "tactics and games played with the text" (de Certeau 1995: 150, 160).[116] Adorno underestimates the potential for varied responses to the "same" text.

Rancière gives readers more credit than Adorno. Perception is also a form of acting that "is already a means of transforming" the world (Rancière 2009: 277). When he overhears, the Duke partakes in what de Creteau calls "an initiatory mode of reading" (de Certeau 1995: 161)—a mode that undermines the assumptions of passive spectatorship. Through his secretive, illicit hearing, the Duke negotiates the terms of the problem he overhears. He reinvents new solutions that neither Isabella nor her brother could foresee. In overhearing, he not only discovers meaning but creates it. There is no unadulterated message that we can locate as originally starting from Isabella and her brother and proceeding to the overhearer. The Duke has his own past experiences, his

[116] De Certeau takes a more cynical view of "hearing green," the Renaissance bodily response to words. Certeau writes, "In earlier times, the reader interiorized the text; he made his voice the body of the other; he was its actor. Today, the text no longer imposes its own rhythm on the subject, it no longer manifests itself through the reader's voice" (De Certeau 1995: 160). The less control the text enacts upon the reader, the more creative the reader can be (ibid., 157). This is good news for Certeau because "the geographical configuration of the text organizes the activity of the reader less and less" (ibid., 161)—the reader is freer to escape the long arms of the text. Speed reading with the eye is a technique Certeau recommends to escape the prison of bodily reading. De Certeau hates the bodily reading that Nietzsche praises. But Nietzsche loves it when words do things, when his readers "read with their ears" (Nietzsche 1966: 182).

own agenda and outlook. The meaning of the scene is constituted by the process the overhearer undergoes as he (the Duke) cultivates or "extrapolates" meaning—it does not fully exist prior to the listening (Mailloux 1982: 28). There is never a way to verify objective or "original" meaning, and it is therefore very ironic that overheard scenes are considered more "truthful."

One of the first moves the Duke makes after overhearing the scene between Isabella and her brother is to lie: He tells Claudio that Angelo "had never the purpose to corrupt her [Isabella]," that he was only testing her virtue, and that there is no way for Claudio to escape death (*MM* 3.1.163-4). But even more impressive/questionable is his next move. He tells Isabella, "The assault that Angelo hath made to you fortune hath conveyed to my understanding" (*MM* 3.1.184-5), thereby attributing his opportunity at eavesdropping to "fortune." He does not feel any need to excuse his nosiness, that he purposely orchestrated the overhearing and asked the Provost explicitly to conceal him so that he may listen unobserved. He presents it as a lucky chance. He then unfolds the plot he seems to have hatched in mere minutes. He not only lies to others himself, as the disguised "Duke of dark corners" (*MM* 4.3.147), but he forces others to lie in hopes that all these lies will come to serve the greater truth in the end—will allow the truth of Angelo's lechery to be exposed to public view.

New Historicist critics (Greenblatt 1982; McCanles 1980), following Tennenhouse (1986), consider *Measure for Measure* to be one of a number of "disguised ruler plays," which index an "anxiety-inducing model of Jacobean surveillance" (Quarmby 2012: 25). These critics argue that the expression of royal authority in these plays resembles a juridico-political power structure described by Foucault, where the

state observes everything. The Duke resembles James I, these critics claim, and the plays call forth a "'new and distinctively Jacobean strategy of representing the orderly state' under the absolutist, divine, and lawful rule of James" (Quarmby 2012 citing Goldberg 1983: 7). Applying this Foucauldian power model to the play, we can see more clearly the intrenched workings of hegemony (represented by the Duke and Angelo) and subversion (represented by Lucio's outbursts) in the play. A police order, as Rancière tells us, is about roles and parts, who is visible and who is not. In this play, the prostitutes are invisible; the nuns are invisible—but the play depends on their invisible presence. The degraded and shameful are both unseen and essential to the action.

Not only does the Duke overhear others but he also uses overhearing to his advantage. The Duke says that because he has "strewed it in the common ear" (*MM* 1.3.15) that he has travelled to Poland, it is believed. He circulates rumors instead of issuing public proclamations perhaps not only because he professes to hate public shows but also because in disseminating knowledge this way, the people *think* they are overhearing some truths and it is more likely to be believed. The Duke never tells Angelo directly where he is going. He tells the common people first and has Angelo overhear it. We get a sense that in this city, news circulates via gossip. The Duke's Vienna is evidently an enormous whispering gallery. The first thing the Duke says upon his return to the city is that "we hear" such good things about Angelo and Escalus (*MM* 5.1.5). Immediately we get this sense of rumors, hear say, what people are talking about, publicness.

It is because so much that is hidden greases the wheels of action in this play that overhearing—existing as it does on the nexus between public and private, blurring the

borders of these would-be separate spheres and making any attempt at a pure politics futile—has such radical potential to repartition the sensible. In a way similar to Isabella's reconfiguration of the police order's partition of the universal public man and the private sphere of woman, overhearing politicizes the border between public and private. The Duke extends the coercive power of his authority when he engages Isabella in his plot after overhearing her exchange with Claudio. There is no realm for private individuals to go unseen. At the end of the play especially, we are left to ponder the connection between inwardness and outer worlds, left with most characters' silence, heightened next to the Duke's public prolixity. Much of the action of the play occurs in private—or, importantly, what characters *think* is private, but which turns out not to be. Isabella bears her secret to Claudio thinking she does so in private. Angelo has sex with Mariana thinking he does so in private. Claudio exchanges marriage vows with Juliet thinking it will be private. This is a police order that operates on a model of the disguised, the unseen. The play also calls attention to the emotional force behind the concepts of public and private, as the staging of state power takes over all realms.

The Duke turns to the private realm and eschews pubic show at the start of the play because he believes it to be more honest. The Duke assumes that what takes place in private is more true: for example, the Duke can assure Angelo of Mariana's virtue because he was her confessor (*MM* 5.1.520). The whole point of his going in disguise stems from his thinking that you can have access to deeper truths via eavesdropping. There is this assumption that you can ferret out "deeper truths." The closer one is physically to something, he assumes, the closer to the truth of it. He doesn't like being looked at from afar because mere looking will always misjudge. In an unconsciously self-

aggrandizing speech, he laments alone: "O rank and greatness, millions of misjudging eyes / Are fixed upon thee; volumes of rumors / Run with their false and most misguided inquiry / Upon thy doing; thousand sallies of wit / Make thee the subject of their idle fantasy / And misrepresent thee in their fancies" (*MM* 4.1.56). Lucio proves the truth of the Duke's worry here—you can only know so much about a public figure and the rest is easy to invent and subject to "idle fantasy." Lucio probably has had minimal interaction with the Duke and extrapolates from there. Stagings never quite give the full outward truth to the people. In this play, the public is code for the false. Even though the truth of Angelo's dishonesty comes out in a huge public show at the end, this public show keeps some truths hidden from its audience—in Isabella's silent response to the proposal of marriage, for example. We are confronted with our very real epistemological limits, even as for the majority of the play, the Duke has bravely attempted to deny them.

Vienna in this play is a patriarchal society where everyone knows his or her place, and after a brief scene of politics, the old structures of power reassert themselves as subjects are drawn back into their former positions. The title "measure for measure" raises questions of equality and exchange, how to make the punishment "fit" the crime. But we learn that the judgments of the police order can only be haphazard and arbitrary: hence marriage as punishment. Importantly, the problems that plague the city at the start of the play have nothing to do with the positions subjects occupy. Everyone is still properly rooted in his or her place at the end. The conventional relations of outcast and ruler, baud and priest, remain. Sexual licentiousness does not threaten the fundamental order of things. When the Duke disguises himself and leaves Angelo in charge, he does not create a new order. Politics only occurs with the improper appearance of Isabella on

the public stage to expose the wrong done her by Angelo, the injustice of the police logic of carefully partitioned parts and *a priori* roles. The Duke sets the play in motion because he desires to know, when "power changes purpose, what our seemers be" (*MM* 1.3.54). In *Measure for Measure*, what is unsaid and private is aligned with the "true essence," "what our seemers *be*," underneath a false public show, a seeming. Overhearing and inwardness, official staging and concealment, obedience and subversion mutually construct and require one another in an ongoing give-and-take that only seems to end when the friar is exposed as the Duke in Act 5.

What motivates the action in this police order—what triggers the Duke's overhearing, what generates the excess of words and the blurring of public and private that I have been describing—is the lack of effect of written texts: the laws have no power, no force, no bodily impact. The citizens are not affected by the laws and go about pursuing their vices. Angelo says to Isabella that with him in power, the law is "awake" (*MM* 2.2.93). The law is a sort of sense experience that the majority of Viennese are not feeling. There is still a hierarchy of places and functions—a police order—but Angelo's job is to make that order visible, to make people feel the law again. He fails, in effect, because he feels too much. He illustrates one of the perils of hearing too much green: When he hears Isabella's words begging him for her brother's life, his passion for her, and his passion for enforcing the letter of the law, outweighs a rational reassessment of his extreme position. His third ear distorts his perspective. All manner of ignoble intrigue can then transpire due to Angelo's lack of restraint. The trick to cultivating the third is to calibrate one's listening to some local principal or ideal, measured by a sense of justice and morality (what Angelo lacks). Although Rancière never mentions a moral compass as

necessary to democratic politics, I believe one is necessary. It grows out of the political scene and can never be known in advance.

In speaking in public, in swearing that she "did yield" to Angelo (*MM* 5.1.101), Isabella erases the boundaries and distances between herself and the speaking subject who is believed. She stages the democratic voice in a scene originally devised by the police order, breaking out of that order. But this can only happen because the Duke overheard her tell her brother what Angelo proposed. The moment of politics that happens in Act 5 can only happen because of the overhearing. What we see in *Measure for Measure* is the fantasy that overhearing can give us access to an unknowable inner truth, but if the Duke repartitions the sensible through overhearing in this play, it is only to create another order of the police. If it is true that, "His whole plan may be viewed as a sort of play within a play to catch the conscience of his deputy—and of the city" (Goddard 1987: 25), then it is the Duke who sets the terms of intelligibility and those terms stay constant.

Sound was the most important sense in the Renaissance. Hearing "casts the subject in a more vulnerable position than seeing does;" Bacon writes that "it is *Sound* alone, that doth immediately, and incorporeally, affect most" (Bacon quoted in Smith 2004: 177). How we react to what we overhear depends upon how we hear, if we "hear green" and resist narrowly focusing on speech's legibility, or if we screen out non-signifying sound and only hear *logos*. Each sense produces a remarkably different apprehension of scenes witnessed. Do we accept the appeal to the ear and its passions, with all the consequences? Angelo's is a cautionary tale. Democracy, politics, disagreement, disordering, and the potential to take into account the unaccounted-for

flow through the cracks of word-sounds and their meanings. Overhearing troubles the differences between inner thoughts, words uttered in private, and public speech. The overheard is the publicly unaccounted-for. The question of how sound is recognized comes to the fore, as overhearing a scene brings a whole new set of conditions to those utterances. We are reminded of the plurality of perspectives that always helps constitute an utterance. We can more easily train our ears to listen well, to listen with all available senses, to "green" language, than we can control the outcomes of what we say. There are no guarantees when we engage in either activity, but an understanding of sensitive listening may draw us closer in our communicative engagement with one another, which underlies any notion of democracy—or it may not, given the necessary excess of sound-words. Our beliefs and what and how we feel—our sentiments—are just as important to the act of listening to as understanding—rationally or intellectually—the words someone says. Perhaps a focus on cultivating our listening skills rather than only our speaking skills can actually enhance democracy. Language's effects on us are beyond anyone's control or ability to classify, and therein lies both the promise and the perils of democracy.

Conclusion: Why Fakeness Doesn't Matter, and Why Acting Helps Us Overcome Trauma

In this dissertation, I have explored theatrical acting as a set of techniques and practices that can revitalize our democracy today. I have argued that the true is not always separate from the performed or scripted and that both should be valued when it comes to cementing political relationships, that sincerity can come from flagrant fakery, that democratic bonds can be forged and repartitioned in new ways through deceptive practices of overhearing, that optimism can challenge structures that maintain inequality, that there is a certain kind of courage that changes the atmospheric mood in which one finds oneself. We can learn in the scenes these plays present before us, in the circumstances of their characters and the affectspheres they create, lessons about our contemporary situations and the politics of our lives.

Chapter one made a few points about the value of acting or disguise for fostering richer, more open, and more fluent democratic discussions. In chapter two, I took up characters in Shakespeare such as Rosalind and Falstaff for the comic courage in a playful mood that they exemplified. Comic courage allows them—and their modern-day inheritors such as Guido in *Life Is Beautiful*—to make the most of the situations they have been dealt. I then moved, in chapter three, to a discussion of optimism in order to show that this mood has the potential to challenge oppressive structural conditions and achieve equality with our fellows. My final chapter discussed overhearing as a technique to repartition the sensible and create moments of politics. The duke of *Measure for Measure* combines all these virtues: he acts to be more sincere (to learn more about his subjects and respond with compassion); he exhibits the courage of the coward (as there is cowardice involved in his being unable or fearing to implement harsher laws and

abdicating his duty[117]); and he holds fast to the optimism of the villain (he is optimistic about solving the city's problems and some might regard his deceit and seeming disregard of Isabella's will in the closing scene as villainous). The Duke is an actor, like Bottom, like our villains, like the courageous Rosalind.

There is a genre of film in which a character returns, usually just as that character is set to inherit some money, and that character's family is unsure whether the character is really the long-lost one.[118] In the film *Anastasia* (1956), for instance, an amnesiac is coached into pretending she is the youngest daughter of the assassinated Tsar Nicholas II of Russia. Her return is treated by suspicion but is nevertheless a joyous occasion: "Anastasia" is reunited with her fiancé and her grandmother, the Dowager Empress. She is welcomed by most of the Romanov family. Her return creates—or recreates—relationships, a renewed sense of togetherness among friends and family. In the end, it does not matter any more whether she is real or not—so strong is the bond and the hope that cements that bond. The Dowager even tells "Anastasia," "If it should not be you, don't ever tell me" (*Anastasia* 1956). In this instance, because "Anastasia" is an amnesiac, she clings to that hope just as strongly as her family. She seeks an identity. The false or the true does not matter (the film leaves the question unanswered and ambiguous)—what matters is the assemblage created, the new sense of family togetherness.

Caroline? (1990) is a similar film, but the viewer eventually learns Caroline is a fake—just as the viewer of *Measure for Measure* knows that the friar is a fake (because

[117] Like a coward, the Duke shrouds himself from visibility as Angelo performs his dirty work: "I have on Angelo imposed the office, / Who may in th'ambush of my name strike home, / And yet my nature never in the fight…" (*MM* 1.3.40-42). The Duke, while lending Angelo his authority ("th'ambush of my name") to clean up Dodge, will not engage his "nature" in the fight to morally improve the city. Angelo acts in his name but without his "nature"—as if the Duke leaves his empty cloak behind in the boxing ring.

[118] Sometimes these movies are simply thrillers and the returned character turns out to be homicidal or violent—but I am not interested in this off-shoot of the genre. Some examples include the TV series *The Family* (Bans 2016); the movies *Libel* (1959) and *The Guest* (2014).

the friar is the disguised duke). But the duplicity inherit in their identities do not stop either the friar or Caroline from accomplishing many good deeds. Recall, the friar undertakes disguise in order to overhear the secrets of his community in order to improve and to strengthen the bonds within that community. The friar wrests law and order from duplicity and deceit—another example of play-acting and disguise leading to a kind of truth. In this film, like in *Anastasia*, "Caroline" returns just before the deadline for claiming Caroline's inheritance. She is up against a suspicious and implacable stepmother who undermines her every attempt to make her stepsiblings more self-sufficient. At the end of the film, "Caroline" has brought the family closer together, narrowed the emotional distance between members, and improved the siblings' lives. The boy overcomes social isolation and the girl overcomes her disability, after having been kept in a state of dependence by her mother and father. Again, whether or not she is the real Caroline or not is irrelevant. She brings people together, heals rifts, eases strife, makes assemblages.

Sommersby (1993), a film based off the account of French peasant Martin Guerre, revolves around the identity theft of Jack Sommersby, returned home after the Civil War. The returned Jack allows newly freed blacks to farm his land, collects money from the townspeople to rebuild the local church, and earns the devotion of his wife. He too is a fake, but is a kinder and more loving man than the real, so that his replacement improves the life of the people around him. Similarly, in the *Simpsons* episode "The Principal and the Pauper," the townspeople turn against the real principle upon his return after a fake has assumed his identity ("The Principal" 1997). When it comes to building community, to establishing democratic assemblages (the ex-slaves in *Sommersby* benefited the most

from the fake Jack), to helping heal wounds, and to re-establishing genuine relationships, identity is a side issue. Regardless of identity, one can act in genuine, community-building ways.

I also hope I have made a minor point about villainy. The way Smiley challenges the politics of womanhood in the original *Lear* text, making Goneril into the hero, reminds us that our conceptions of villainy change over time—especially for women. True, for some, Goneril might unforgivably seem ungrateful to her father. There is no doubt about her villainy in the original text. (It is Goneril, after all, who encourages Cornwall to "pluck out" Gloucester's eyes [*Lr*. 3.7.5].) But the signs of her corrupted womanhood, the index of her poverty *as a woman*, do not resonate with us today. Her childlessness, her domineering qualities, do not register in the same way. Shakespeare, if he had the word, would call her bossy (a colloquial U.S. term that dates from an 1882 *Harper's* magazine article with this sentence: "There was a lady manager who was dreadfully bossy;" "bossy," *OED*, 2). But today, there is a campaign afoot to replace the word bossy with something like "executive leadership skills" ("Ban Bossy;" "LeanIn.Org"). Moreover, consider how standards of morality for women have changed. Movies like the 1950 melodrama *Born to Be Bad* excoriates its main character for marrying for money and then wanting to have an affair with the man she loves. For a real life example, consider the ways successful career woman by necessity spoke of placing their family before their career always.[119] Would comics like Amy Schumer or Ali Wong

[119] Margo Jefferson (2015) puts this well in her memoir *Negroland*: "The famous women we gazed upon never stopped reminding us that we must cherish that generic female future. Especially the artistic, glamorous ones. … In interview after interview, women celebrities would flaunt their families or their dreams of family …[N]othing mattered more than their children, or the children they hoped to have" (Jefferson 2015: 235). That happens today sometimes—former Michigan Governor Jennifer Granholm speaks often of how marrying the right man is important—but it is important to having a strong career, she says, which is not the same as emphasizing the "generic female future" Jefferson writes of.

have been able to tell the same jokes, express the same irreverence towards marriage, in the 1960s? It is a sign of a fairer universe that their stars are on the rise. Any judgement of villainy takes places among cultural mores and traditional standards of morality. In reclaiming Shakespeare's villains, I hope to have underscored their quests, their fantasies of recognition as human beings with the same rights and privileges (though they be aristocratic privileges) of their fellows.

I want to close by suggesting the idea that since the trauma of 9/11, Americans have been healing. A nation is not an individual, and yet we can draw some parallels in the way that the time of trauma works, and the role of democratic techniques in the healing process. Elisabeth Anker has recently argued that after 9/11, Americans felt the need to project strength, sometimes to the detriment of their democratic ideals. Their ideals of sovereign agency, when they failed to measure up, left them inflated and demoralized. Anker writes, "For political subjects who are shaped by liberal individualism's heroic expectations of mastery, yet who experience dependence, exploitation, constraint, and fear on a regular basis, *the strength demonstrated by bold state actions [after 9/11] was a model*" (Anker 2012: par. 2, my emphasis). We might read this also as a response to trauma. I share with Anker the sense that the neoliberal state is in many ways an ignoble model, and that heroic ideals of sovereignty can let one down in the worst ways, but perhaps this need for heroism was a kind of response to the trauma of 9/11.

We can use trauma to interpret our history of the past 15 years, the changes in our political culture. Because democracy, I consider to be more of an atmosphere, or an affectsphere, rather than a series of phenomena to be separately encountered, processed,

and digested. Instead of imagining human beings doing democratic things like voting, or running for office, this dissertation has focused on how they make democratic atmospheres, democratic affectspheres, how they create democratic cultures and ways of being. Looking at it this way, how can we overcome our traumas?

Some scholars suggest the ties between modernity and trauma run deeper (Saltzman and Rosenberg 2006; Gilroy 1993; Kaplan 2005; Micale and Lerner 2001). As Noelle McAfee writes:

> Modernity has not simply been a time in which massive traumas have occurred, it is also something borne of trauma. Modernity is the renunciation of tradition's authority, the differentiation of society, the Copernican revolution, meaning both the astronomical and the philosophical shift in our understanding of our own place in the order of things. ... I do not think that we yet fully fathom, nor have we worked through, this transformation into modernity. Much less have we recovered (McAfee 2008: 33).

My chapter on comic courage argued that, in a world after the death of the sacred, and doubt in the transcendent and the absolute, comic courage provides the best alternative, for it is courage without faith in an ultimate meaning. Seeking final, fixed meaning the way Hamlet and Brutus do, seeking order in things, trying to position things in their proper place and time, always oversteps the mark, and can only finally fail. But I did not address the trauma involved in making the step from the world where a human being's place in the universe is secure, where the model of autonomous, sovereign agency is never doubted, and the world that we cannot yet "fully fathom." This takes, as psychoanalysts would say, "working through" (LaCapra 1998)[120] Comic courage is borne of a recovery process that the US has yet to attempt.

[120] Dominick LaCapra also links "working through" to democratic politics. "In respect to an event of such incredible dimensions as the Holocaust, it may also be impossible for those born later ever to fully transcend this event and to put it in the past, simply as the past. But it may be possible, and in some sense it has to be possible, if you believe in anything like a viable democratic politics, to enable the further

Trauma entails endless repetition. Working through would stall that. In my chapter on comic courage, I located an untimeliness in the way viewers see *Hamlet* as a tragedy (even as Hamlet himself exhibited a melodramatic kind of courage, seeking to affirm linearity and moral rightness). Time is radically broken in Hamlet's universe. The past and future make claims on us that we, simply, cannot answer. It is comic courage in a playful mood that, I believe, holds the best response to this untimeliness, for it is comic courage that affirms meaninglessness, that gives up the search for meaning. That playfulness is most needed to heal from the traumas that untimeliness imposes.

If our time is "borne of trauma," as McAfee suggests, if our old meaning-making systems are showing signs of wear, if our sense of order and place has been forever altered, then time will work differently for us as well. Here is one account of this difference:

> [T]rauma destroys the fabric of time. In normal time, you move from one moment to the next, sunrise to sunset, birth to death. After trauma, you may move in circles, finding yourself being sucked backwards into an eddy, or bouncing about like a rubber ball from now to then and back again. August is June, June is December. What time is it? Guess again. In the traumatic universe, the basic laws of matter are suspended: ceiling fans can be helicopters, car exhaust can be mustard gas (Morris 2015: xii).[121]

Morris's specific point is that, for survivors of PTSD, the sight of a ceiling fan will take them back to that day in Fallujah when their buddy's helicopter was downed by ground-to-air missiles.

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processes of working-through that are not simply therapeutic for the individual, but have political and ethical implications" (LaCapra 1998: 7).

[121] This reminds me of WWII correspondent Ernie Pyle's famous description of what military life is like after weeks under fire: "It all works itself into an emotional tapestry of one dull dead pattern—yesterday is tomorrow and Troina is Randazzo and when will we ever stop and, God, I'm so tired!" (Pyle quoted in Tobin 1997)

But we also live in a "traumatic universe," sustained by constant fears of terrorism, the attacks we have had seared in our memory. Sometimes the kaleidoscope of history turns so fast and so uncontrollably, that there is no time to thoughtfully understand historical events in retrospect. It is hard to understand much less recover from accumulated trauma. Every time we witness a new attack, we move in circles. The event remains a part of our psycho-geography, shaping the rhythms of our days, sometime tearing at the very fabric of democracy—especially as some react to trauma by desires to undermine freedom, police Muslim-Americans, seeking a spurious security rather than forms of collective togetherness and flourishing that might instead bring lasting peace and healing. Hatred and anxiety is the knee-jerk response to terrorism and threat—to trauma.

Trauma could also allow one of gain wisdom and potentially grow from the event. One strategy to try and manage traumatic time is through storytelling, locating an event in narrative. "All sorrows can be borne if you put them into a story or tell a story about them" (Dinesen quoted in Arendt 1998: 175). How we incorporate the trauma into a continuing story of our lives is also the way we repair the tears in the fabric of democracy. Stealing others' identities, acting in plays, creating actorly assemblages, cultivating an equalizing optimism, and doing so with a playful courage, allows us to arrange our wounds and traumas in ways to then work through them. It is not necessary that we work to restore linear time, but it is important to rearrange time in less traumatic ways, to tell our stories with techniques (actorly techniques) that engage with others in democratic, creative ways.

The paradigmatic subject of liberalism does not need acting. In contesting this model of the liberal subject and arguing for the importance of acting, I have tried to

showcase alternative models for democratic living. The experiences and interactions spawned by acting are always unknown and unpredictable, and democracy requires that we come to terms with unpredictability. New forms of being and doing are opened up by acting, new designs for living. Democratic attributes that characterize institutional structures, which could add up to something impersonal and dull, are modified when considering democratic sensibilities. I champion not only the model of the actor but offer a model of the theater as a democratic space, a collaborative and exciting place where all voices are recognized as worthy. Even with a dictatorial director, theater is always by necessity a collaborative enterprise. At its best, it illuminates what is possible for democracy. For example, renowned theater director John Logan, when a member of the cast or crew produces an unlikely idea, although he recognizes immediately its improbability, will say, "Okay, let's try it." That is because, Logan says, "The most tender time is the moment of creation. That's when you mustn't hurt a person. You must treat him as though he were sick—gently, understandingly, tenderly" (Lincoln quoted in Barnett 1949: 104). Perhaps the first moments of democratic deliberation should be treated like this: fragile, handled gently, a collective acknowledgment of each party's vulnerability. As Logan recognizes, not only are actors vulnerable and responsive to each other, but the director is vulnerable to the prop man, the prop man is sensitive to the costume designer, the costume designer is open to the producer—because they each depend on each other, just as members of a democratic polity do. Each rates a full share of the credit for a successful show. Democratic deliberation would be stronger by reason of having considered the vulnerabilities and dependencies involved.

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Curriculum Vitae

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Ph.D., Political Science, Johns Hopkins University, September 2016

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M.A., English, University of Virginia, 2005

B.A. with Distinction, Foreign Affairs and English, University of Virginia, 2003

AREAS OF SPECIALIZATION

Political theory; history of political thought; early modern literature and politics; Shakespeare studies; affect studies; feminist and queer studies; race studies

CAN TEACH COURSES IN

History of Political Thought; Contemporary Political Theory; Democratic Theory; Classics of Political Thought; Feminist and Queer Theory; Greatness and Democracy; Nietzsche; Deleuze; Introduction to International Relations; Republicanism; Politics of Eastern Europe; Soviet Politics; Democratic Consolidation; Shakespeare and Politics; African-American Political Thought

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Instructor, "Feminist and Queer Theory: Politics and Performance," Spring 2016

Instructor, "Whiteness and Racial Identity," Intersession 2016

Instructor, "Democracy and Greatness," Spring 2015

Co-instructor, "Revolutions: Theory and Practice," Intersession 2010

Teaching Assistant, "Republicanism," Fall 2011, Spring 2010

Teaching Assistant, "Classics of Political Thought," Fall 2010

Teaching Assistant, "The Politics of Good and Evil," Fall 2009

Guest Lecturer, "Hobbes's Commonweath," November 10, 2010

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PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES

Assistant Editor, *Political Theory: An International Journal of Political Philosophy*, July 2012–September 2013

Co-organizer, Conference on "Dangerous Crossings: Politics at the Limits of the Human," Johns Hopkins University, October 2010

PUBLICATIONS

"Can prophecy save us?": Book Review of *American Prophecy: Race and Redemption in American Political Culture* by George Shulman, borderlands 13:2 (2014)

CONFERENCE PARTICIPATION

"Comic courage," Northeastern Political Science Association, Philadelphia, PA, November 2015

"Is it Curtains for Greatness?: Acting as a Democratic Form of Greatness," poster presentation, APSA, Chicago, IL, August 2013

"Democratic Audacity," Graduate Student Colloquium, Johns Hopkins University, April 2013

"*Arcadia* and the Difficulty of Action," Conference on "Difficulty, Intransigence, Failure," Johns Hopkins University, April 2009

"Shattering time and space: white spatial and historical imaginings in Octavia Butler's *Kindred* and James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*," Conference on Race Theory, University of Virginia, November 2003

HONORS

Teaching Fellowship, Women and Gender Studies Program, Johns Hopkins University, Spring 2016

Baden-Württemberg Scholarship to teach at the University of Mannheim, Spring 2015

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Graduate Student Fellowship, Political Science Department, Johns Hopkins University, Fall 2008–Spring 2013, Spring 2015, Spring 2016

George Owen Fellowship, Johns Hopkins University, Fall 2008–Spring 2011

Preferred Participant Fellowship, School of Criticism and Theory, Seminar on "Anticolonial Metaphysics," Cornell University, Summer 2009

WORK EXPERIENCE

Freelance Writer, Barnes & Noble, Spark Educational Publishing, New York, NY. Wrote SparkNotes materials, including college profiles for new national college guide, *283 Great Colleges*. May 2007–December 2007

Legislative Assistant, Congresswoman Lynn Woolsey, Washington, D.C. Managed legislative portfolio that included civil rights, immigration, election reform, arts/humanities, and women's issues. Developed successful amendment to affordable housing bill. Wrote speeches and answered heavy volume of

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Associate Writer, EMILY's List, Washington, D.C. Wrote candidate profiles, biweekly emails, and newsletter articles for nation's largest grassroots political organization. Supervised writing interns. February 2005–June 2006